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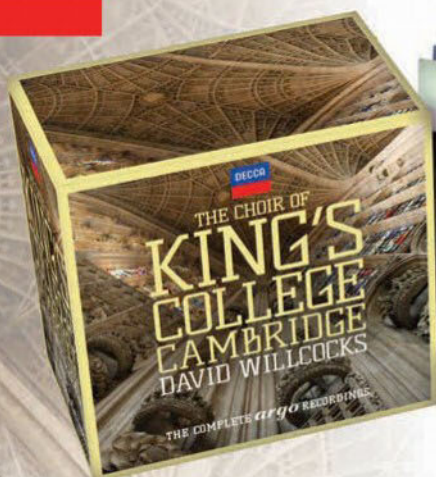
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GRAMOPHONE

US & CANADA SOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Applebaum

30

Terry Longshore *perc* **The Southern Oregon University Percussion Ensemble / Bryan Jeffs**
Innova © INNOVA928 (72' • DDD)



As anniversary presents from Northern California composers go, Mark

Applebaum's *30*, written for his wife on the occasion of their 30th, sets a high standard. Consisting of three intersecting, 10-minute long pieces called 'Decades' for up to seven percussionists that can be played separately or simultaneously, Applebaum's highly sophisticated attempts to separate music out from time and space employ 12 virtuosos playing a garage-band array of resources. It works because of the human brain's ability to 'learn' sounds almost instantaneously. As a result, once heard either in its entirety as *30*, or in its three component pieces, each of which has a certain ambling quality, or in the three other configurations on the CD, the material becomes strikingly three-dimensional, clearly related musical entities fully as rich, absorbing and identifiable as melody or harmony, all in a new, similarly 3D sound universe.

The First 'Decade' is scored for a solo player in a symmetric stereo setup, with identical glass bottles, cowbells and woodblocks for left and right hands. The four players the Second 'Decade' is scored for are also charged with executing hand gestures and vocalising hissing sounds. The Third 'Decade' comprises 10 continuous episodes, scored for seven players playing conventional percussion instruments augmented by unique sound-effect devices and entirely new instruments of the composer's own design.

Adding a nice human touch, Applebaum wrote the music so it would 'involve as many of his colleagues as possible' while at the same time 'creating pieces of variable technical demand – in inverse relationship to their personnel size'.

Laurence Vittes

GRAMOPHONE *talks to...*

Stewart Goodyear

The Canadian pianist on why and how he came up with his new arrangement of *The Nutcracker*

What drew you to *The Nutcracker*?

I've been drawn to *The Nutcracker* since I was a year old. Like many youngsters, I was enchanted by Tchaikovsky's music and, as a child, I would go with my parents to see the ballet every Christmas. Even now, Christmas is not complete for me until I hear *The Nutcracker*.

There's already a transcription of the Suite, so why now do the complete ballet?

I first transcribed the March five years ago, and once I started, I couldn't stop. The complete ballet is a breathtakingly brilliant masterstroke of musical storytelling, and as I was going through the full score, I was delighted how well it worked pianistically.

What are the main challenges in reducing such a score?

The main challenge is making the listener



forget that this work was originally for large orchestra. A beloved work like *The Nutcracker* could not be approached as a Liszt transcription. The entire orchestration had to be incorporated while keeping the graceful, balletic aspects of the music. Therefore, I approached it more like original Mussorgsky that would later be orchestrated by Ravel.

Do you have any other orchestral works in your sights?

Time will tell!

Brahms • Mozart

Brahms Clarinet Quintet, Op 115

Mozart Clarinet Quintet, K581

Anthony McGill *cl* **Pacifica Quartet**

Cedille © CDR90000 147 (69' • DDD)



Pairing the Mozart and Brahms quintets for clarinet and strings is a tradition in

concert and, even more so, on recordings. Although they share certain formal traits, in addition to the complement of instruments, they are different enough in atmosphere and expressive design to provide a sublime dual listening experience.

And, obviously, playing experience, as evidenced by the illuminating performances on this disc featuring Anthony McGill, principal clarinet of the New York Philharmonic, and the Pacifica Quartet, a group that appears to have the rare ability to slip into any style and sound utterly at home. The collaborations in both pieces have a sense of organic and flexible unity, as if the musicians had worked meticulously on every detail of phrasing, balance and pacing.

The performances are sleek, in the best sense of the word, with an emphasis on the Classical side of these works. The Mozart quintet sounds at once noble and buoyant, its transcendent second movement almost floating on air, and the variations of the finale are deftly characterised.

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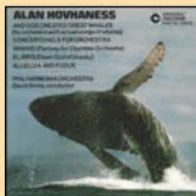
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CD803: Majnun Symphony. National Phil. of London.
CD804: Etchmiadzin Symphony, Fra Angelico, Mountains & Rivers Without End. Royal Philharmonic.
CD801: All Men Are Brothers (Sym. 11, Royal Philharmonic), Prayer of St. Gregory, Tzakerk, Armenian Rhapsody No.1. (many more CDs: see web)



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Some of the most delightful music for oboe since the 18th century." Stereo Review • **CD723:** Rendezvous & Dreams by Kosins; Muradian, Concerto; Biggs, Dance Suite; La Traille, Quintet (Oboe & Strings). "*musically intuitive artist. Illuminating, entrancing recital.*" American Record Guide. "*colorful new works*" Gramophone



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Paul Dukas is famous for the brilliantly orchestrated *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Surprisingly, between 1886 and 1889 he failed to win the Prix de Rome competition four times and consequently destroyed many works. Miraculously, several ambitious and varied compositions survived in the competition's archive and are presented here.

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Clarinetist Anthony McGill and the Pacifica Quartet: they perform Mozart and Brahms on their new Cedille recording

In the Brahms, the musicians breathe as one in the long phrases, which swirl or suspend as required, without any need to stretch beyond the music's natural inclinations. McGill's poetic fluidity and the Pacifica's supple precision assure that the score emerges with sensitive freshness.

These interpretations are such meetings of inspired equals that it's surprising to discover that the names of the Pacifica musicians are nowhere to be found in the printed materials. So here they are: Simin Ganatra, first violin; Sibbi Bernhardsson, second violin; Masumi Per Rostad, viola; and Brandon Vamos, cello. **Donald Rosenberg**

Crumb

'George Crumb Edition, Vol 17'

Voices from the Morning of the Earth^a.

An Idyll for the Misbegotten^b. *The Sleeper*^c

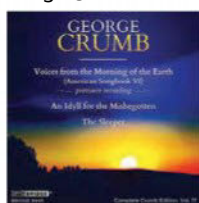
^a**Ann Crumb** sop ^a**Randall Scarlata** bar

^b**Rachel Rudich** fl ^c**Marcantonio Barone** pf

^b**David Colson**, ^b**Paul Herrick**, ^b**AJ Matthews** perc

^a**Orchestra 2001 / James Freeman**

Bridge © BRIDGE9445 (66' • DDD)



George Crumb has had the good fortune to live a long life and produce an array of

inventive works in many genres. Few composers of any period conjure sound worlds as arresting, novel or distinctive as Crumb, who is represented on this 17th volume of his music on Bridge Records by three works of varied topic and scoring.

The most recent, and substantial, has the voluminous full title *Voices from the Morning of the Earth: A Cycle of American Songs from North and South, East and West* (2008). Typical of Crumb, beloved music is turned slightly on its ear, in these cases through rhythmic displacement and the shimmering and cataclysmic input of four percussionists playing a platoon of instruments. The cycle evokes many aspects of nature even as it sheds new sonic light on folk and popular tunes of distant and recent eras.

Although the two other Crumb pieces are much shorter, they are no less impressive in capturing the mood of the subject or text at hand. *An Idyll for the Misbegotten (Images III)* (1986) places a solo flute – the excellent Rachel Rudich – in Debussy-like juxtaposition to three percussion players, to mesmerising effect. In *The Sleeper*, verses by Edgar Allan Poe undergo radical transformation as the music takes the female narrator and pianist through a magical maze of expressive auras.

The performances throughout are lucid and powerful. In the song-cycle, soprano

Ann Crumb and baritone Randall Scarlata make vivid contributions in a striking collaboration with Orchestra 2001 under James Freeman. **Donald Rosenberg**

Glass • Reich

'Minimalist Guitar Music'

Glass Music in Similar Motion. Two Pages

Reich Piano Phase

Massimo Menotti gtr

Orange Mountain Music © OMM0106 (61' • DDD)

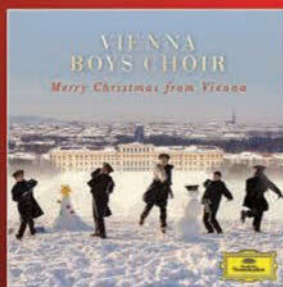


The extraordinary precision and tonal characterisation that the Italian guitarist

Massimo Menotti brings to his recital of 'three masterpieces of Minimalism', written between 1967 and 1969 by Philip Glass and Steve Reich, catch and distil precious moments in music history. To do so, Menotti recorded each layer of the music himself, performing and recording over previously self-recorded tracks 'using techniques pioneered by the two Minimalist founders'.

The most immediately striking of the three, perhaps deriving from the increased energy of its brighter melodic line, is Steve Reich's *Piano Phase*, originally for two

Classics for the Holidays



VIENNA BOYS CHOIR Merry Christmas from Vienna

The Vienna Boys Choir is certainly one of Austria's most famous cultural exports. For this holiday album, special guest artists Aida Garifullina and Rolando Villazón join the choir for an eclectic selection of holiday favorites, ranging from "Carol of the Bells" to "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." 028948319479



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Soprano Renée Fleming's first-ever holiday album celebrates the beloved and iconic Christmas season in New York City. Fleming is joined by a wish list of pop, Broadway and jazz greats in traditional and contemporary favorites. Also available on DVD 02894867438078



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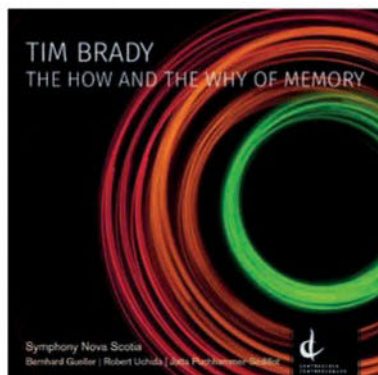
Following his critically acclaimed albums *Voice of Assisi* and *Voice of Joy*, Friar Alessandro presents his beautiful new album *Voice of Peace*, with a universal message of spreading harmony throughout the world. Spanning five languages, the album includes such favorites as "Ave Maria", "Amazing Grace" and much more. 0289489118625

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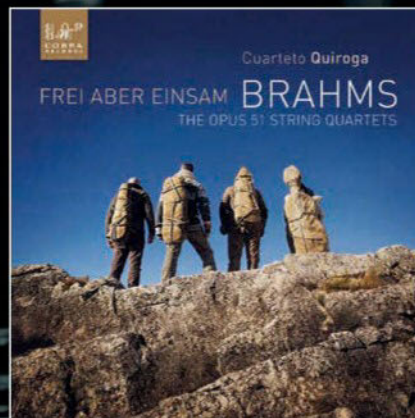
Three major new orchestral works by Tim Brady, featuring impressive live performances by Symphony Nova Scotia, under the direction of Bernhard Gueller.

Concertos with Robert Uchida (violin) and Jutta Puchhammer-Sédillot (viola), and the first recording of *Symphony #4*.

YouTube: *Tim Brady & Symphony Nova Scotia*

PREVIOUS REVIEW

"Tim Brady's *Third Symphony, Atacama*, (is) a work of haunting and explosive power." - GRAMOPHONE



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pianos, which, like all the music in this recital, works well for other instruments – trending harpsichordist Mahan Esfahani included it on his recent debut CD for DG. Menotti's guitar version has wonderful aura and glow.

Glass's *Two Pages* (1968), originally for organ, comprising five pitches in G minor, does not contain any dynamic markings and can also be played on any combination of instruments; in fact, a new recording for chamber ensemble has just been released by Eighth Blackbird (Cedille). In his *Music in Similar Motion*, again without dynamics, Glass starts with one voice, adds another playing a fourth above, then another playing a fourth below, 'and finally a last line kicking in, to complete the sound', each new entering voice bringing with it a subtle but noticeable dramatic change. In a *tour de force* performance requiring the intense focus of a watchmaker, Menotti takes up the role of all the instruments from Glass's own recording: three woodwinds and three electric organs.

Laurence Vittes

Krieger

'Urban Dreamings'

Sternenjäger I^a. before|QUAKE^b. II cimitero chiuso^c. V^d. ...as above, so below... (for PN)^e. Azrael II^f

^aErik Drescher *bfl* ^aChristian Vogel *bcl* Ulrich Krieger ^esax/^atsax/^aelecs ^dJohannes Uhle *org*

^bCalifornia EAR Unit; 'Sonic Boom';

'Ensemble Experimente' / Gerhard Scherer
Mode © MODE282 (71' • DDD)



Southern California-based Ulrich Krieger continues to redefine the new-music mainstream with six works in which he takes listeners beyond the mere physical experience of the out-of-body sonic environments he creates into intensely uncertain, highly compelling free-form excursions. The effect is seductive to the extent that when each of the six tracks ends, the fade-away has been so perfectly graduated that it is almost as if the music were continuing on in ghostly, ambient whispers. Demonstrating his range, each of the six works, composed between 1997 and 2005, stakes out considerably different sonic landscapes. He uses acoustic and non-acoustic instruments in a wide-ranging variety of configurations that reflect his continuing interest in 'mixing band-type instrumentation with classical instruments



'Extraordinary precision and tonal characterisation': Massimo Menotti plays Glass and Reich on his new disc

(think Doom Metal meets Scelsi)', and what has become his signature ability to create seemingly electronic music with acoustic instruments.

Works such as *Sternenjäger I* and ...*as above, so below...* (for PN), the latter for 14 multitracked sopranino saxophones, are rooted in Krieger's work as an unleashed, classically trained saxophone virtuoso. The larger pieces, meanwhile – *V* for church organ with mechanical registers and *Azrael II* for solo cello (played without mercy by Dmitri Jurowski), chamber ensemble and electronics – and smaller conceptual fantasies such as *before|QUAKE*, written for the California EAR Unit, in which the three instruments function like 'tectonic plates moving against each other', foreshadowing an eventual but unheard

eruption, pay homage to his intense interest in locating boundaries between noise, silence and music, and between the rock and classical avant-gardes.

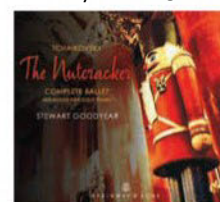
Laurence Vittes

Tchaikovsky

The Nutcracker (arr Goodyear)

Steward Goodyear *pf*

Steinway & Sons © 30040 (82' • DDD)



Pianophiles may be familiar with Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite* by way of Mikhail Pletnev's popular solo piano adaption or Nicolas Economou's two-piano version. Wonderful as these

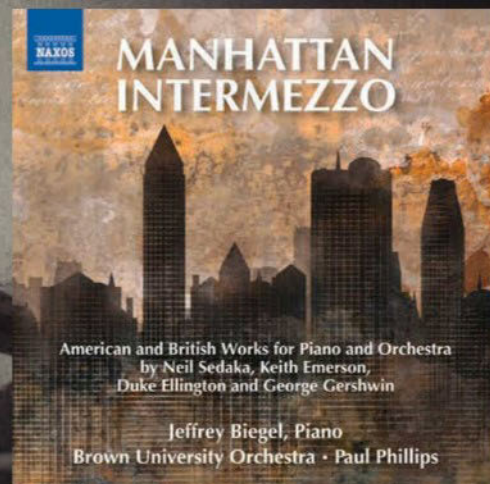
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A remarkable new take on an old classic: Stewart Goodyear performs his own arrangement of *The Nutcracker* on his new disc for Steinway & Sons

efforts are, they take a back seat to Stewart Goodyear's extraordinary arrangement of the entire ballet for two hands. This *tour de force* of transcribing ingenuity and virtuoso stamina is on par with Liszt's Beethoven symphony transcriptions, and equally rewarding from both pianistic and musical vantage points.

Goodyear's sense of the piano's geography, his ear for varied and meaningful registration and his ability to create full-bodied, contrapuntally elaborate textures without cluttering up the canvas yield results that sound so natural and idiomatic that one hardly misses the felicities of Tchaikovsky's original orchestration. Note, for example, the subtle upward and downward shifts that give variety to the arpeggios in 'A Pine Forest in Winter' and 'The Magic Castle', the elaborate yet crystal-clear *staccato* and *legato* perspectives in 'Grandfather Dance' or the lilting transparency he brings to the droning accompaniment of the 'Arabian Dance'.

The beauty and cultivation of Goodyear's pianism helps, as well as his truly danceable tempi. He avoids most pianists' temptation to rush the March, while opting for an unusually forthright pace for the 'Dance of the Reed Pipes'. The 'Waltz of the Flowers' often overbuilds and pounds its chest, but not in Goodyear's refreshingly crisp, lightly

pedalled rendition. And how does Goodyear manage to make the piano's high register in 'The Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy' sound like Tchaikovsky's original celesta?

If the pianist's hour-long variation set based on The Beatles' 'Eleanor Rigby' (to be performed in New York in January) proves to be on the same remarkable level as this release and his complete Beethoven sonata cycle, I know at least one composer/pianist/*Gramophone* reviewer who will die of envy! **Jed Distler**

Wolpe

'Music for Violin and Piano (1924-1966)'

Violin Sonatas - No 1; No 2 (fragment). Duo for Two Violins, Op 2. Two Studies for Two Violins and Piano. Piece in Two Parts for Violin Alone. Second Piece for Violin Alone

Movses Pogossian, Varty Manouelian *vns*

Susan Grace *pf*

Bridge © BRIDGE9452 (68' • DDD)



(1901-72) with discs devoted to chamber, piano and vocal works. In Vol 7, Movses Pogossian is the intrepid and probing soloist in Wolpe's violin repertoire, with occasional

assistance from two expert colleagues, violinist Varty Manouelian and pianist Susan Grace. The journey provides an overview of the composer's style from young maverick in 1924 to established master in 1966.

The disc begins and ends in the 1960s, providing a framework to discern how Wolpe's inquiring art developed over four decades. In the brief *Second Piece for Violin Alone* (1966), the soloist travels a vast range of ideas, from spiky and poetic to enigmatic. Back in 1924, the *Duo for Two Violins*, Op 2, reveals a composer absorbing the music of his time, including Bartók's folk-driven aesthetic, while starting to forge a rigorous and occasionally lyrical style. Wolpe uses 12-tone techniques in *Two Studies for Two Violins and Piano* (1933) with an individual and compelling voice.

The two violin sonatas are lessons in meticulous design and expressive resiliency, though only one is complete. *Sonata 1949* – the First's actual title – is a four-movement work abounding in vibrant material, some of it pitting violin and piano against one another. Wolpe only wrote 29 bars of a second sonata in 1958, placing the instruments in alienated juxtaposition. The *Piece in Two Parts for Violin Alone* (1964) rounds out the disc in a rich outpouring of soaring, nervous and impish gestures.

Donald Rosenberg

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Christmas and the gift of music in all our lives

This Christmas Eve, as they have for almost a century, the congregation in the chapel of King's College, Cambridge, will take their seat for the annual Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. Many will have queued for hours in the fierce Fenland cold to be part of this famous and evocative tradition. In greater warmth, individuals, families perhaps, will tune in to BBC Radio 4 and other stations worldwide. They, as the hosting vicar at the beginning of Radio 3's *Choral Evensong* (another beloved religious and musical tradition), reminds us every week, are part of the service too.

For King's, several significant events are being marked this year. It's 500 years since the chapel was finished, since that extraordinary soaring stonework and vaulting became one of the defining monuments of Gothic architecture. But 2015 was also the year Sir David Willcocks, Director of Music at King's for 17 years, died aged 95. As befits someone whose descants have come to define the way many of us hear certain carols, not least *Hark! the herald angels sing*, the service will feature some of his arrangements. It will also feature a setting by John Scott, Organist and Director of Music at St Thomas, New York, who died earlier this year at the much younger age of 59.

The contribution both conductors made to all our musical lives are explored in this issue: in Willcocks's case through our review of Decca's richly fascinating new box-set of his recordings with King's; in Scott's case through a poignant piece written shortly before his death by one of our writers who attended the recording sessions of St Thomas's beautifully



performed new Christmas album, 'Dancing Day', one of my Editor's Choices in this issue.

And then there will be the new carol, this year by Richard Causton. Every year since 1983 the current Music Director, Stephen Cleobury, has commissioned a new carol, many of which have found their way into the wider repertoire. Acknowledgement of history, faithful remembrance of past colleagues and friends, the nurturing of the future: all these lie at the heart of Christmas, and its heady and poignant mixture of celebration and reflection. Sometimes it takes an institution or a tradition – whether musical or liturgical – to embody it all, to make it easier to grasp.

What King's does will be replicated throughout the world. The Christmas season always draws many who might not otherwise have done so into concert halls, whether to hear masterworks from the choral repertoire from adults or to be moved and inspired by children giving end-of-term school performances. Works of many ages will be performed by people today in countries and languages far removed from when and where they were written.

This year's newspapers and broadcasts have paid testimony to an uncertain year marked by moments of horrific and heartbreaking tragedy. It is one of music's greatest gifts – and privileges – that it can, whether in sacred and secular contexts, provoke thought, provide peace and offer us strength, both through making our past part of our present and by giving us faith in the future.

My best wishes for Christmas to all our readers.
martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'I feel especially lucky to have had the opportunity to speak with John Scott and to observe him working with his

beloved St Thomas Choir just a few months before his tragic death aged 59,' writes **ANDREW FARACH-COLTON**, who has written about the recording of the choir's new disc of Christmas music. 'In short, the hours I spent with him were an inspiration.'



'It's hard to think of a more colourful showpiece among Bach's most popular choral works than

the glorious *Magnificat*,' writes **DAVID VICKERS**, 'so it was a thrill per minute to drop in on John Butt and the Dunedin Consort when they recorded both works within the liturgical context of Bach's 1723 Christmas Day Vespers service.'



'My opera heroes growing up tended to be the baritones, and none sounded more heroic to me than Sherrill

Milnes,' writes former *Gramophone* Editor **JAMES INVERNE**. 'So when I eventually met him and discovered he was also a great raconteur it was far from a let-down. And now I'm honoured to write his Icons appreciation as he turns 80.'

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is the magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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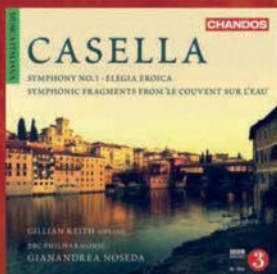
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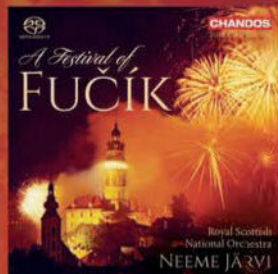
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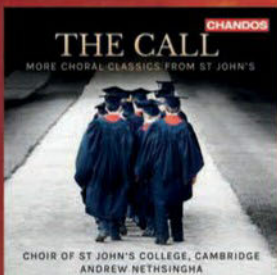
The Best of 2015



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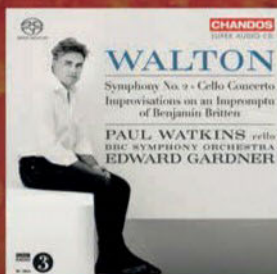
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DELPHIAN



DCD34165

SCHUBERT LIEDER NACHT UND TRÄUME

Ailish Tynan, Iain Burnside

This selection of songs could carry the subtitle 'Women in Love'. 'L'Education sentimentale', perhaps. Ailish Tynan and Iain Burnside have assembled a portrait gallery: a whole bevy of Schubert's women pursuing different sorts of love, nurturing different Biedermeier dreams. Goethe's Gretchen finds an intriguing counterpart in Schiller's Amalia. Ellen gazes out over Loch Katrine, while Serafina looks down affectionately at her fortepiano. A young nun welcomes her destiny as the bride of Christ. This, the first volume in Burnside's carefully crafted voyage of Schubert song, sees Ailish at the height of her career in music that has been her 'life's dream' to record.



DCD34151

Valentin Silvestrov: Piano Sonatas

Simon Smith

Following his acclaimed recording of Alfred Schnittke's complete piano music, Simon Smith turns his attention to Schnittke's near-contemporary, the Ukrainian composer Valentin Silvestrov. Smith's precision and technical agility make him the ideal choice for this first survey to focus on the 1970s – an important period in the formation of Silvestrov's later style. The *Classical Sonata* is an ostensibly Mozartian work in which nothing is quite as it seems, while its three numbered successors provide further glimpses into Silvestrov's unique relationship with memory and the past.

'engagingly performed and atmospherically recorded ... a magical quality that is almost unique in contemporary music'

— BBC Music Magazine, October 2015



DCD34160

Loquebantur: Music from the Baldwin Partbooks

The Marian Consort / Rory McCleery;
Rose Consort of Viols

John Baldwin was a lay clerk at St George's Chapel, Windsor in 1575 and became a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1598. The so-called 'Baldwin partbooks', held at Christ Church, Oxford, were his creation – a very personal collection, representing his individual tastes and interests from a wealth of English and Continental polyphony and consort music. As in their previous collaboration, an exploration of the similarly conceived partbooks of Robert Dow, the Marian Consort and Rose Consort of Viols have kept faith with Baldwin's own intentions, bringing to light some of the rarer gems preserved by this great advocate and music-lover and providing the listener with 'such sweete musicke: as dothe much delite yeelede'.

'spartan but severely beautiful ... The acoustic of Merton College chapel provides ideal focus and warmth'

— The Observer, November 2015

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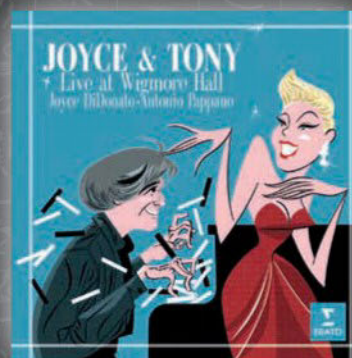
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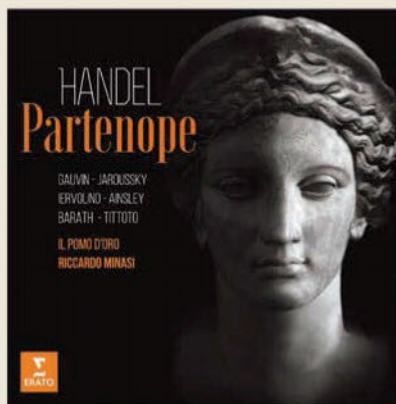


GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews




RECORDING OF THE MONTH



HANDEL
Partenope
Sols incl Karina Gauvin & Philippe Jaroussky;
Il Pomo d'Oro / Riccardo Minasi
Erato  2564 60900-7
► **ALEXANDRA COGHLAN'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 38**

Brilliant singing and thoughtful characterisation from Gauvin and Jaroussky, and a conductor in Minasi who relishes the score's dramatic potential, make this a superb release




'DANCING DAY'
Music for Christmas
St Thomas Choir of Men & Boys / John Scott
Resonus  RES10158

A moving tribute to the late John Scott's wonderful leadership of his New York choir: Britten's and Rutter's celebrations of traditional carols are all beautifully performed.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 31**



BARTÓK Chamber Works **LIGETI** Concertos
Ensemble Intercontemporain / Matthias Pintscher
Alpha  2 ALPHA217

A generously filled and superbly performed survey of works by Bartók and Ligeti, not least the three solo instrumental concertos by the latter.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 40**



BEETHOVEN
Symphonies Nos 5 & 7
Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra / Manfred Honeck
Reference Recordings


 FR718

A new release of two of music's most famous (and recorded) works, but a compelling one, really worth hearing.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 41**




PROKOFIEV. TCHAIKOVSKY
Piano Concertos
Beatrice Rana *pf*
S Cecilia Orchestra / Sir Antonio Pappano

Warner Classics  2564 60090-9

The concerto debut of a young pianist garnering much praise – and on the strength of this disc, quite right too!

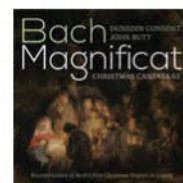
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 52**



'MINORITEN-KONVENT'
Aliquando
Muso  MU008
A fascinating disc: sonatas from a late-

17th-century manuscript which offer a real insight into violin music of the era. Superbly played, and featuring a wonderful-sounding chamber organ.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**




JS BACH Magnificat
Dunedin Consort / John Butt
Linn  CKD469
Another intriguing and excellently

performed project from Butt and his Dunedin Consort: a delightful recreation of what Bach's first Christmas in Leipzig might well have sounded like.

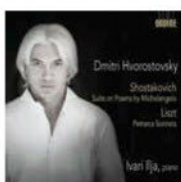
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**



JS BACH Mass in B minor
Monteverdi Choir;
English Baroque Soloists
/ Sir John Eliot Gardiner
SDG  2 SDG722

Thirty years since his pioneering first version, Gardiner returns to re-record the mighty Mass in B minor; the impressive result draws on all his great knowledge and experience of Bach's music.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**




LISZT Petrarch Sonnets
SHOSTAKOVICH
Michelangelo Songs
Dmitri Hvorostovsky *bar*
Ivari Ilja *pf*
Ondine  ODE1277-2

A fine communicator – not to mention a baritone of real warmth – Hvorostovsky offers powerful performances of these settings of Italian poetry.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 85**





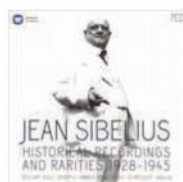
'ARIE NAPOLETANE'
Max Emanuel Cencic
countertenor Il Pomo d'Oro
/ Maxim Emelyanychev
Signum  2 SIGCD433
'An exceptional

recital,' writes our critic; this superb countertenor brings excellent drama and emotion to a thoughtfully programmed survey of Neapolitan Baroque arias.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 101**



DVD/BLU-RAY
MAHLER Symphony No 7
Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra / Riccardo Chailly
Accentus  DVD ACC20309;  ACC10309
A chance to watch Chailly and his musicians explore Mahler's Symphony No 7 in another fine film from Accentus.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 46**



JEAN SIBELIUS
HISTORICAL RECORDINGS AND RARITIES 1928-1943
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 42**

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FOR THE RECORD



Take a bow: Seong-Jin Cho swept all before him at this year's Chopin Competition

Seong-Jin Cho triumphs at the 2015 Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition

The 17th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition has been won by 21-year-old Seong-Jin Cho from South Korea. He took the Gold Medal and a €30,000 cash prize; he also won the Fryderyk Chopin Society Prize for the best performance of a polonaise. Second prize went to Charles Richard-Hamelin from Canada (who also won the Krystian Zimerman Prize for the best performance of a sonata) and the Bronze was awarded to Kate Liu from the United States (who also took the Polish Radio Prize for the best performance of a mazurka).

Seong-Jin Cho is a pupil of Michel Béroff at the Paris Conservatoire. He is something of a competition veteran, having won the International Fryderyk Chopin Competition for Young Pianists in 2008, and third prize at both the 2011 Tchaikovsky Competition and the 2014 Arthur Rubinstein Competition (in Tel Aviv). He has given concertos with conductors including Valery Gergiev, Lorin Maazel and Mikhail Pletnev.

Ten pianists from eight countries reached the finals and each performed one of the Chopin piano concertos (nine chose the First and only one, Charles Richard-Hamelin, chose the Second). In all, 450 pianists born between 1985 and 1999 entered, 160 of whom went through to the public rounds with

77 selected for the main competition. Poland fielded the most entrants (14 pianists), followed by China (13), Japan (12), South Korea (eight), Russia (six), the US (four), Italy, the UK and Canada (three each), the Czech Republic (two) and one each from Belarus, Croatia, France, Greece, Hungary, Indonesia, Latvia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

The competition was presided over by a 16-person jury that included Dmitri Alexeev, Martha Argerich, Philippe Entremont, Nelson Goerner and Garrick Ohlsson, and was chaired by Katarzyna Popowa-Zydrón.

A recording of Seong-Jin Cho – made live at the Chopin Competition – has been released by Deutsche Grammophon and includes the Op 28 Preludes, Nocturne No 13, Piano Sonata No 2 and Polonaise No 6. It will be reviewed in a forthcoming issue of *Gramophone*.



Martha Argerich honoured with the RPS Gold Medal

Martha Argerich has been awarded the Royal Philharmonic Society Gold Medal by RPS Chairman John Gilhooly, who said: 'Martha Argerich's combination of technical mastery and passionate artistry make her one of the most compelling and expressive pianists, and her extraordinary live performances are a musical and intellectual *tour de force*. She is a consummate chamber music collaborator. It is this spirit of

'Classical 100' brings classical music to primary schools

Launched in early November, 'Classical 100' is now available to teachers in primary schools across England. The online initiative, developed by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), Classic FM and Decca Classics, aims to introduce children to 100 recordings of classical music pieces. Taken from Decca's catalogue, they represent a rich diversity of styles that span more than 10 centuries – from Hildegard of Bingen to Graham Fitkin.

Any school that registers for 'Classical 100' can access the recordings as well as information about the composers and the stories behind the music. In addition, ABRSM will also draw on its network of primary school experts to create a range of downloadable materials, helping teachers even further in bringing the music to life. Moreover, the programme is supported by the Department of Education, and can be used to meet certain National Curriculum Key Stage 1 criteria. Schools can gain full, unlimited, free access by registering at abrsn.org/classical100

Alondra de la Parra to head Queensland Symphony Orchestra

The Queensland Symphony Orchestra has named Mexican conductor Alondra de la Parra as its Music Director. It's the first time any Australian orchestra has created such a role. She takes up the position at the start of the 2017-18

collaboration that led to the Progetto Martha Argerich at the Lugano International Festival, now in its 15th year, through which she demonstrates her enduring generosity and personal commitment to emerging musicians and, by mixing established and up-and-coming artists, has created many inspirational chamber music partnerships.'

The RPS Medal was first awarded in 1870 and Argerich is the 101st recipient. Other notable winners of the medal include Johannes Brahms (1877), Edward Elgar (1925), Herbert von Karajan (1984), John Tomlinson (2014) and Antonio Pappano (2015).



Heading to Queensland: Alondra de la Parra

season (the orchestra's 70th anniversary season) but will open the QSO's 2016 season with Mahler's Second Symphony on February 27 next year.

De la Parra, born in New York City, moved to Mexico as a child where she discovered her desire to become a musician. At 19, she returned to New York to study at the Manhattan School of Music. In 2004 she founded the Orchestra of the Americas with whom she recorded 'Mi Alma Mexicana' for Sony Classical, a collection of Latin American orchestral music which achieved platinum sales in Mexico in less than two months.

Vasily Petrenko extends his Oslo Philharmonic contract until 2020

Former *Gramophone* Young Artist of the Year Vasily Petrenko has extended his contract with the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra until the end of the 2019-20 season. The partnership has not only worked 'at home', but has raised the orchestra's international profile with, in 2015 alone, visits to the BBC Proms and the Edinburgh Festival, and a 10-concert tour to Japan. 'After two seasons with me at the reins, I think we have freshened up the orchestra and introduced some great music that hasn't been heard in Oslo for many years,' Petrenko said. 'The idea is that we should always embrace the audience and be embraced in return by the audience, to be part of one large family and break down the artificial barrier between musicians on stage and the public in the hall.'

The Oslo Philharmonic returns to the UK in the spring with a programme that combines the Fifth Symphonies of Shostakovich and Mahler. The tour begins in Manchester with a concert at Bridgewater Hall (March 7) with dates at The Anvil, Basingstoke (March 9), London's Cadogan Hall (March 10), Colston Hall, Bristol (March 11), Symphony Hall, Birmingham (March 12) and Saffron Hall in Saffron Walden (March 13). Later next year, the orchestra visits Germany, Switzerland and Austria.

Petrenko and the Oslo PO have recorded Szymanowski violin concertos (with Baibė Skride) for Orfeo, Shostakovich's cello concertos (with Truls Mørk) for Ondine and, to launch a new relationship with the Norwegian Lawo label, Scriabin's Third and Fourth Symphonies (marking the start of a proposed cycle).



Vasily Petrenko: embracing Oslo audiences

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NEWS & FEATURES

In a special EFG Conversation for the *Gramophone* website, James Jolly speaks to Daniele Gatti, who takes over as Chief Conductor of the Royal Concertgebouw next season, about the role of the conductor today.



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If you're after a recording recommendation for a particular work, then a *Gramophone* Top 10 list is the perfect place to visit. We have Top 10s dedicated to everything from the works of Rachmaninov, Beethoven and Mozart to genres such as symphonies, string quartets and British choral works. Each recommended recording is linked to its original *Gramophone* review, and we are frequently adding new Top 10 lists, so do keep your eyes peeled.

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Leipzig in winter: a painting of the Thomaskirche by Mendelssohn

Bach's first Christmas IN LEIPZIG

Bach's initial Christmas Day Vespers as Thomaskantor was an overt display of music-making, with his *Magnificat* taking pride of place. For the Dunedin Consort's new recording, John Butt has reconstructed the whole service as Bach might have celebrated it in 1723, writes David Vickers

There have been eminent recordings of Bach's *Magnificat*, whether big or small or all sorts of shapes and sizes in between, but as I sit at the back of Edinburgh's historic Greyfriars Kirk on a gloriously sun-drenched July evening it becomes apparent that John Butt and the Dunedin Consort are in the midst of producing a barnstormer. There are beaming smiles from the musicians – and after the final strains of the *Magnificat* are safely in the can, Linn's Producer Philip Hobbs is unable to control his excitement. 'Sometimes I have to pinch myself to remember I'm actually getting paid to do this,' he tells me. 'It's just such incredibly fantastic music!' During the sessions I repeatedly overhear players and singers expressing similar



astonishment at their good fortune in participating in such special music-making. The vocation of a musician can be a thankless task, but days like this seem to remind the Dunedin Consort of why they wanted to pursue their chosen profession.

Bach would have understood better than anyone that the career of a musician has its challenges. After a few years of working happily as the Kapellmeister at the court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, it seems that things took a turn for the worse when the Prince's new wife was not keen on her husband's passion for music (Bach later described her to a friend as 'eine Amusa' – someone immune to the Muses), and this coincided with Leopold's funds being drained by increased contributions to the Prussian military. Moreover, for some

years Bach had had no opportunity to perform concerted music in church services because the court chapel at Cöthen was strictly Calvinist; this must have been unfulfilling for such a supreme organist and gifted composer of sacred vocal pieces who had become accustomed to writing this sort of music for liturgical use in Mühlhausen (1707-8) and Weimar (1708-17). In such a light, it is not surprising that in December 1722 Bach applied for the position of Thomaskantor in Leipzig, a job that required its occupant to be church organist, choirmaster and composer at the city's Thomaskirche, teacher at its associated school next door, and also to lead musical life at the city's three other main churches. In many senses, the role of Thomaskantor was not dissimilar from being the municipal director of music for the imperial free town; Leipzig was the home of a prestigious university and a thriving centre of mercantile trades, reputedly larger than the kingdom of Saxony's capital city Dresden.

The drawn-out selection process took many months. The Thomaskantor Kuhnau died in June 1722, and two months later the town council offered the job to the former Leipzig law student Telemann, who had only recently settled in Hamburg and mulled over the offer for three months before declining it politely (it helped that the Hamburg authorities gave him a pay rise). Next, the comparably talented Fasch declined the position, and so did the Thomaskirche alumnus Graupner, who could not extricate himself from his employment for the Landgrave of Hessen-Darmstadt. Bach had no such difficulties in being released amicably by Prince Leopold, who provided a glowing reference. On April 19, Bach pledged that he would instruct the schoolboys 'not only in the regular classes...but also, without special compensation, in private singing lessons', and also accepted that he would pay out of his own pocket for any assistance he might require if 'someone should be needed to assist me in the instruction of Latin'. Three days later the Leipzig authorities voted unanimously in favour of appointing Bach, and the minutes recorded that town councillor Dr Steger hoped Bach 'should make compositions that were not theatrical.'

Such a vain hope would have been blown sky-high by the elaborate music Bach performed on Christmas Day 1723, if not before. These services heralded the festive celebrations with a suitably celebratory reinstitution of spectacular music after the penitential season of Advent. For the 7am Mass at the Thomaskirche on Christmas morning Bach revived his old Weimar cantata *Christen, ätzet diesen tag* (BWV63), probably written for Christmas Day in 1714 or 1715, and he also unveiled a short new Sanctus in D major (BWV238). Two hours later at 9am the same cantata was repeated again at a service in the university's Paulinerkirche. Without much time



John Butt records hymns with a brought-in congregation at Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh

for respite, the afternoon Vespers at the Nikolaikirche started at 1.30pm and featured the third performance of the same cantata that day and also the original E-flat major version of Bach's *Magnificat* (BWV243a), which included four inserted Christmastide antiphons. The next day the location of each service was swapped around, so morning Mass at the Nikolaikirche featured a new cantata (BWV40) and a repeat performance of the Sanctus, whereas the afternoon Vespers at the Thomaskirche repeated the cantata and

also featured another performance of the *Magnificat*. Sure enough, much of Bach's music for these five services in the space of two days was highly theatrical.

For his new recording, John Butt has consulted closely with former cleric turned musicologist Robin A Leaver for a liturgical reconstruction of Christmas Day Vespers as Bach might have celebrated it in 1723, so in addition to the *Magnificat* and *Christen, ätzet diesen tag*, there are also suitable organ preludes, a motet and purely liturgical elements – such as the set of choral responses to intonations from a

celebrant, and several congregational hymns. All this has been researched and selected with the diligence that was a hallmark of the Dunedin Consort's reconstruction of the Good Friday Vespers including the *St John Passion*. Butt has also ensured that language coach Margarethe Macpherson is on hand to talk the singers through the Germanic pronunciation of the Latin.

Christmas in Leipzig in 1723 would have been rather chillier and a good deal less comfortable for Bach's hard-worked musicians than the balmy summer conditions that greet me in Edinburgh when I arrive for the start of the Dunedin Consort's first session. 'We've already got one aria in the can!' John Butt tells me. Philip Hobbs and Assistant Engineer Robert Cammidge set up and balanced the microphones during that morning's rehearsal, and it went so smoothly that they've started recording already. The *Magnificat* is only just over half an hour long, even in its original E flat version with extra antiphons, but there is still a lot of music to cram into these sessions. Butt already knows that there's slightly too much music to fit on a single CD. 'There'll be a few little bits like some extra organ preludes, one of the hymns, the responsory, collect and blessing that we'll make available as free downloads for people who want to hear the full liturgy – although we're not going to include an optional sermon in German, like we did with our *John Passion* Vespers!'

Butt himself is playing six of Bach's chorale preludes on the Greyfriars organ, and these formulate a vivid sense of drama. The first vocal music in Bach's Vespers, Butt tells me, would have been a motet, 'sung by the first "Cantorey" of the Thomasschule's eight most advanced specialists, who were trained to sing double-choir motets. I've chosen

Gabrieli's *Hodie Christus natus est*, one of the motets printed in Erhard Bodenschatz's *Florilegium Portense*, a two-volume collection that was used by Lutheran choirmasters. Obviously we're doing it in a Bachian way rather than in the earlier 17th-century Venetian style, so that means no sackbuts, cornetti or theorbos, but only a continuo group of cello, violone and organ on the bass line.' The little Gabrieli motet remains glorious in its Bachian garb, but after the last cadence ebbs away Hobbs is already rushing in to reposition the double choir line-up; he separates the singers, initially standing in a single row, so there is now about eight feet between the two quartets, and he also adjusts the microphones to capture a clearer sense of antiphonal separation. It requires a few takes for everything to gel but everyone is buzzing at singing some Gabrieli.

Later in the week, an invited congregational choir will assemble at Greyfriars Kirk to record three hymns, with organist Stephen Farr providing Bachian embellishments between the verses; two of these are popular Lutheran Christmas hymn tunes, *Vom Himmel hoch* and *Puer natus in Bethlehem*, using harmonisations from Gottfried Vopelius's *Neu Leipziger Gesangbuch* (1682) – a hymnbook still in circulation in Bach's time. As the sessions are running happily ahead of schedule, Butt decides spontaneously to record selected verses from these hymns to be sung by the Dunedin Consort in four-part harmony (the congregation will supply the remaining verses in unison). Coming at the end of a long day's work, it breaks down into laughter a few times, but before turning in for the night the session finishes with Nicholas Mulroy stepping up to perform the function of a celebrant invoking a series of choral responses. Hearing these being worked on by performers who not many minutes ago were refining the grand trumpet-laden climax to the *Magnificat* shows in a nutshell the wide contrasts of musical texture, style and scale that were all part of Bach's liturgical music-making. His Leipzig predecessors had already created church music featuring instruments and solo voices since the 17th century, but the new Thomaskantor created an astonishing corpus of distinctively characterised works on an almost weekly basis during his first few years in the job, drawing influences from recent musical styles imported from Italy and France and fusing them within his own unique compositional voice. Accordingly, the simpler hymns and responses not only show how singing and music operated on different levels during Lutheran services but also how the interjection of Bach's elaborate concerted music must have had a powerful dramatic impact within the liturgy. Butt agrees: 'When we hear it alongside the archaic chant and responses, the startling modernity and theatrical colours of Bach's music emerge really clearly.'

The boldest possible impact of Bach's largest-scale music is to the fore in sessions devoted to *Christen, ätzet diesen tag*. Bach's only cantata featuring four trumpets is structured as



Julia Doyle, Joanne Lunn and Claire Evans; Pamela Thorby and Frances Norbury

'When we hear Bach's music alongside the archaic chant and responses, its startling modernity really emerges' – John Butt

so that they can properly articulate the words before they sing them. At one stage with the opening chorus, Butt throws caution to the wind and says, 'Let's try a ridiculously fast version, just to see what it's like!' Far from being rushed, it feels more eloquent, shapely and relaxed; there are crisper words and more relaxed gestural details from the eight singers, whose intricate contrapuntal parts are like an animated conversation.

Bach delivers plenty more knock-out blows in the *Magnificat*, the canticle from St Luke's gospel recounting the elated song of the pregnant Mary during her visit to her also-pregnant cousin Elizabeth. All Vespers services in Bach's time featured the canticle text sung or recited in one form or another, but the concerted music performed on Christmas Day 1723 must have struck the Leipzig congregation as extraordinary. The stile antico fugue 'Sicut locutus est' and its transition into the doxology 'Gloria Patri et Filio' is routinely a fulsome moment in larger-scale performances, but the Dunedin Consort's 10 supremely capable singers create an enthralling ebb and flow in the unaccompanied upward-melismatic sequences that Bach creates upon reaching the word 'Gloria'. In the extraordinary harmonic climax to this section, Butt's sheer mastery of Bach's layered sonorities hits me right in the solar plexus – and then there's the sucker punch when the wind and brass kick in on those glorious cadences. The transparency of sonorities is a vivid characteristic of Butt's approach to Bach's original E flat version of the *Magnificat*, and he explains this is helped by choosing low pitch for the strings and woodwind (A = 392Hz, known in Bach's time as tief-Kammerton), although the trumpets are actually playing at higher pitch (A = 415) in D major: 'This mixture of instruments playing at different pitches was common for Bach in Weimar, Cöthen and perhaps in his earliest years in Leipzig; the heavier string gauges and slightly larger woodwind instruments mean we can explore richer sonorities at the lower pitch.'

There are several differences between this early version of the *Magnificat* and the more familiar revised version in D major that Bach prepared during the early 1730s. The alto aria 'Esurientes', sung with a lightness of touch by Clare Wilkinson, has a pair of recorders (in the later version Bach changed them to transverse flutes). It's beguiling stuff – at the aria's conclusion you can hear a pin drop, although one of the takes is interrupted by Hobbs, who says: 'Clare – just a bit of a frog in the throat in your first entry...', to which the good-humoured Butt instantly

a mirror-image chiasmus, and the triple-time opening chorus and exuberant closing chorus 'Höchster, schau in Gnaden an' both fizz with excitement in the rapid-moving strings and three oboes, with plenty of booming splendour from the quartet of trumpets and timpani – all of whom are clearly having the time of their lives. Third trumpeter Michael Harrison confides that he has now recorded it five times and that it's still one of his favourite Bach cantatas. Butt asks the eight-strong chorus to chant the text first in order to get the rhythmic and syllabic stresses just right

responds, 'Only a tadpole, surely!' Another subtle difference is the slide trumpet playing the *tonus peregrinus* (instead of oboe) in the trio 'Suscepit Israel'; the airy refinement of the weightless upper strings, without basso continuo roots, is matched by Wilkinson, Julia Doyle and Joanne Lunn, but it is visibly hard, physical work for Paul Sharp to control the notoriously fiendish slide trumpet. It is well worth the effort as his efforts to contribute soft, long-held notes result in a spellbinding texture.

The most obvious distinction from the more familiar, later version of the *Magnificat* is four additional Christmas-related antiphons. In Bach's manuscript these pages are inserted at the end after the *Magnificat*, which prompts speculation from scholars that maybe they were festive additions incorporated into a score that had already been composed and performed earlier on in 1723, perhaps for the Feast of Visitation on July 2. Butt requests that the four-part choir and doubling woodwind and strings strive to be 'more cheerful and bell-like' when they record the first antiphon *Vom Himmel hoch*. The second interpolation is *Freut euch und jubiliert*, a succinct little piece for two sopranos (which Butt doubles with oboes), alto, tenor and simple continuo, full of tricky details and florid word-painting not far removed from Bach's more extensive motets. In contrast, the third antiphon, *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, is a simple homophonic setting that proves to be a doddle to get in the can. The fourth and last additional antiphon is *Virga Jesse floruit*, a duet for soprano Julia Doyle and bass Matthew Brook, accompanied only by basso continuo.

It is fascinating to observe the collective joviality and concentration that ensures none of the familiar *Magnificat* movements are merely formulaic. When the choir's tuning at a chromatic crunch point in 'Omnes gentes' needs to be rehearsed slowly a few times and there is a small risk of energy seeping from the session, Hobbs announces wittily: 'I could do with a bit more from the tenors – there's a first time for everything!' Joanne Lunn sings radiantly during the recording of 'Et exultavit', and is accompanied by refined chiaroscuro phrasing from the strings; there is a refreshingly happy character to her contoured long phrases, but at one point she runs out of breath, laughs, and apologises; some conductors might tut irritably at such lapses, but this only sustains the amiable atmosphere of the session. There is also warmly jocular singing from Matthew Brook in 'Quia fecit mihi magnam', matched by basso continuo (including bassoon) that brims with personality, although after the first take Brook wonders if the instrumentalists were a little bit overly keen to reach the quick semiquavers, and so they try again but this time with more air and space in the bass-line figurations. Nicholas Mulroy sings 'Deposuit potentes' with proclamatory vigour while the violins play at the lowest end of their range with muscular flexibility, but the conductor is not yet happy with the opening ritornello and encourages the violins and bass line (cello and violone) to initiate more conversational exchanges. Bach's interest in Vivaldi and recent Italian music is invoked in Wilkinson and Mulroy's hushed lullaby-like 'Et misericordia', supported by intelligently articulated strings, and also in Julia Doyle's rapturous dialogue with Alexandra Bellamy's melancholic oboe in 'Quia respexit'.

Such moments of introspective beauty and intimacy are vital ingredients in the Dunedin Consort's celebration of Bach's kaleidoscopic festive music – music that transformed church life beyond recognition in 18th-century Leipzig. **G**

► To read Gramophone's review of the Dunedin Consort's recording of Bach's Christmas Day Vespers, including the *Magnificat*, turn to page 80

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THE WONDROUS MYSTERY OF STILE ANTICO

As the early music choral group celebrates its 10th anniversary with a Christmas disc, Caroline Gill discovers how these musicians continue to deliver their resolutely pure sound

Andrew Griffiths, who sings bass with Stile Antico, is beaming when he sits down with his chorus mates Eleanor Harries and Rebecca Hickey. They have spent the first session of the day working on Hieronymus Praetorius's Magnificat for the group's new disc of Flemish and German Christmas music, and Griffiths is particularly upbeat about it. 'There's a magic number between eight and 12 parts where it all gets very hard,' he says. 'But doing the Magnificat this morning was small enough for you to be able to think about it like a string quartet.'

There is a sense of relaxed relief in the air that things are going well, despite the amount of music the group has to cover for this recording, and everyone collapses happily into chairs, with tea and cake, to talk over the years since the group's beginnings. 2015 has been a year of 10th celebrations for Stile Antico. A 10th birthday recital at London's Wigmore Hall in July and an extensive tour of the United States – their 10th –

as well as these sessions on their 10th disc have all served to illustrate how far the group has come over those years. Since their success at the York Early Music Festival in July 2005 they have established a unique niche in the choral music arena with their resolutely pure sound. It is one that has evolved less in weight, volume and depth, and more in the degree of perfection to which that purity has been honed. It is also one that is particularly well suited to the repertoire on 'A Wondrous Mystery': the Christmas disc that is causing so much infectious humour between them today.

Although there are pieces on this recording that make their way onto the vast majority of releases of early Christmas music – Michel Praetorius's *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen* is no stranger to any number of those examples, from the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, to recorder arrangements by Michala Petri – the majority do not. It is a blend of formal and informal polyphony, interspersed with music that is more redolent of

folk dance than the purest of High-Church heritage from which it purports to come. *Übers Gebirg Maria* by Johannes Eccard, Kapellmeister in Berlin in the late 16th century, is an infectious but highly polished piece of church homophony, whereas the Hieronymus Praetorius Magnificat incorporates references to ancient carols such as *Josef lieber, Josef mein*. It is repertoire at opposite ends of a spectrum with which Stile Antico is intimately acquainted, although that's not to say that this repertoire is not a challenge for them. 'Much of it is slightly counter-intuitive for us,' says Griffiths. 'Homophonic music can be harder than polyphony, where at least you can react to something that's going on the whole time. With homophony you have just got to get everything perfectly together.'

This is a particular challenge, I suggest, for a group that works without a conductor. It is enough of a challenge for smaller ensembles that work in a similar way, such as Gallicantus or the Queen's Six. Stile Antico's size, however – they rarely sing with fewer than their full complement of 12 – presents even bigger challenges with ensemble and tuning. 'For any new concert programme there will be in the region of 12 three-hour rehearsals,' says Griffiths, 'which I'd hazard is two or three times as much as any conducted group.'

There are plenty of details to hone without the fallback of a conductor-centric dictatorship, and I wonder whether the group has a consciously drawn hierarchy to help work through what must be inevitable differences of opinion. 'I also work as a conductor,' says Griffiths, 'and if I'm working with a choir, I would expect a member to think twice before they suggest anything. But for us there is a house style that has emerged over 10 years – there's now quite a lot that just doesn't need discussing.'

That doesn't really answer the question of whether there is a hierarchy, but allowing the conversation to wander onto the specific details of the personnel offers a clearer picture. That the group that burst onto the early music scene in 2005 bears such a close resemblance to the group that is recording today shows not only that there is no interpretative pecking-order, but that there is no need for one. 'There are still six of us who were there right from the beginning,' says Hickey, who sings soprano. 'And apart from one person who came in three years ago, everyone has been in the group for at least six years. It's really important to have those six who started the group in the first place – the ethos of the group comes from them.' Is it possible to put into words what that is? 'It's the love of the music,' says Hickey, emphatically. 'And the fact that we're doing it because we want to explore the music, and give it the best performance we can give.' This is an important point, and one borne out as clearly in visual terms as it is aurally when watching the group rehearse.

Standing in the formation of a wide arch in the church of All Hallows, Gospel Oak – with its sympathetic acoustics and unusually quiet urban location – the group walks an aural tightrope between spreading out far enough to create a space



Democracy in action: the conductorless Stile Antico at the Gospel Oak recording sessions

'There is an old-school purity and lightness to their sound which is undeniably appealing'

around the sound and defining each voice part enough to enhance the idiosyncrasy of their purity of sound. The group's size makes it difficult to imagine how they can sing together as they do without a director. One might think that staying together in pitch and beat is so demanding without one that there is no intellectual or musical room to pay attention to the stylistic elements of the music they are singing. Yet they not only breathe

as one – particularly noticeable at the beginnings and ends of phrases – but they also move through the phrases in a way that makes them look like a single entity.

So how to define the Stile Antico sound, one that, to my ears, remains so 'traditional'? Although any member of the group would say, rightly, that their sound has matured and deepened over the course of their years together (and, indeed, they laugh when talking about listening to their first disc of music for compline, saying 'we sound so young!'), it is nevertheless undeniable that there is an old-school purity and lightness to their sound which is defining and undeniably appealing. In many ways, as a listener, the sound – with considerable emphasis on a searingly pure top line – is a refreshing return to that of vocal ensembles of the 1990s. It is too simplistic to say that it is redolent of the completely straight and meticulous sound of Trinity College Choir under Richard Marlow, for instance, who strove to leave the sound understated enough for the music to speak for itself with minimal interpretative interference. Stile Antico may make a sound which is in that tradition, but two generations on, and without the responsibility of presenting this repertoire to an audience as completely new music, there is now more space for artistic expression.

'Part of our ethos is to do with how we work as a group,' says Griffiths, 'as well as just the music itself. I think that influences the sound, that being aware of the whole texture in a way that we might not if it was simply concentrating on how you sing according to one person at the front.'

The perfection of the tuning and blend is such that Robina Young, Harmonia Mundi's distinguished producer and a long-time collaborator with Stile Antico, will very rarely pipe up from the box that something needs doing again due to intonation issues. She works, instead, to ensure that their long, arching single takes inject a deeper degree of coherence into the music than is possible with several short takes, however perfect an impression of tuning and blend those may give.

So, do they have a plan for the next 10 years? Many umms and ahhs between the three – the democracy evident even in the kitchen of All Hallows – end with alto Harries venturing that 10 years might be a bit far to plan ahead. Five, then? 'Oh, well – to keep on building repertoire,' says Griffiths firmly. 'Which is happening. To do more Continental repertoire, more of the early music, and more one-to-a-part.'

For now, though, this quietly elegant group is happy as it is, with the notes on the page and delivering their customary pure performances of beautiful music. **G**

Stile Antico's *A Wondrous Mystery* is reviewed on page 89

Christmas

ON FIFTH AVENUE



With its noisy, midtown-Manhattan location, Saint Thomas Church is a challenging venue for recording a Christmas album – yet the choir’s pure, firm tone is able to fill the resonant space effortlessly, writes Andrew Farach-Colton

John Scott, organist and Director of Music at Saint Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue, New York, died suddenly in July – he was 59 (our obituary ran in the Awards issue). Three months earlier, he and his New York choir had recorded a Christmas album for Resonus, and our writer attended the sessions. We publish the article as a tribute to Scott and his wonderful relationship with the choir.

Saint Thomas Church sits solemnly on the busiest stretch of Fifth Avenue. Flanked by brightly lit flagship stores, and cheek by jowl with the Museum of Modern Art, Saint Thomas offers quiet and quite sumptuous sanctuary in the tumultuous heart of midtown Manhattan – although, on this mild mid-April evening, it’s not nearly quiet enough.

The boys of the Saint Thomas Choir are recording music for a Christmas album and it’s rush hour. Every car horn and rumbling subway train is a potential hazard. To make matters worse, on one side of the church the magnificent stained-glass windows by James Humphries Hogan have been removed for restoration. Large screens, placed to keep the elements out, provide no real sound insulation.

Even under these tense circumstances, the church’s organist and Director of Music John Scott works with unflappable calm. Apart from the choir and some members of the recording crew, there aren’t many people around – yet with the boys dressed in their scarlet vestments there is a palpable sense of occasion. And, most importantly, the choir sounds marvellous. As they sing the *Coventry Carol* and their pure, firm tone fills the resonant space, one might momentarily forget about the traffic outside and the fact that Christmas is long gone and far away. The spell is soon broken, alas, as a loud honk from a passing car intrudes on a particularly lovely phrase.

Adam Binks, the recording’s producer, valiantly attempts to get as many clean takes as possible, though not always successfully. At one point, after yet another rudely placed honk, Scott vetoes a requested retake. ‘I think we’ll leave it,’ he insists quietly, obviously protective of the boys’ stamina and focus. Musical concerns like tuning, rhythm, pronunciation, tone quality and phrasing are handled not only efficiently but with respectful professionalism. True, these are just boys, but Scott speaks to them as one musician to another rather than as an adult to a child.

Scott came to Saint Thomas in 2004 from St Paul’s Cathedral in London, where he had served as organist and Director of Music for 14 years. ‘I felt very privileged to be at St Paul’s,’ he tells me. ‘It was a great place to work, and I remember so many wonderful, inspiring occasions.’

‘I’d been to Saint Thomas on two occasions to work with the choir when my predecessor here, Dr Gerre Hancock – a great luminary figure in church music in North America – invited me to his annual choirmasters’ conference. The first time was in 1998, I believe, and it was a tremendous experience. I could see that there was a very special set-up at Saint Thomas, with its residential choir school. Then, when Dr Hancock announced his retirement, I felt, well, maybe this is the right opportunity – and it’s now or never.’

Saint Thomas is the only residential, church-affiliated choir school in the United States. ‘There are 31 boys,’ Scott explains, ‘so they’re very much a unit – socially, educationally, and musically. What’s nice is that these kids can be quite nerdy in their own way, without having any peer pressure. They’re not in a bigger school where others might tease them for singing church music. They’re really not aware of that at all. I suppose they’ll have quite a shock when they get to their next school. But it’s a great environment where you can really build a choir.’

The choir sings five choral services a week: Evensong on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, and two services on Sundays. ‘It’s manageable because we rehearse every morning except Monday. I see the boys before school at 8am. They’re quite fresh at that time of the day,’ Scott chuckles. ‘I find them alert and responsive.’

Scott, as an Englishman at an American institution, has explored the music of his new homeland and reached out to American composers. ‘I commissioned a Mass setting from Nico Muhly in 2006, before he was well known and while he was still very much a protégé of John Adams. It’s a really good piece, and we recorded it along with Bernstein’s *Chichester Psalms*, Copland’s *In the Beginning* and Barber’s *Adagio*. This was all new repertoire for me, but as I said before, it’s always tremendously exciting to find new things.

‘I’ve never felt any constraint about whether we should sing English or American music. We’re part of the Episcopal Church, which has very strong ties to the Church of England but still has its own ethos. We embrace the Anglican choral



'We sound the best in our own room, as any group does': the late John Scott directs his choir at Saint Thomas Church in midtown Manhattan, New York

tradition – that's in our mission statement – and I think that perhaps the Episcopal Church in America has drawn largely from that tradition. So, we don't actually sing that much American music.' He estimates that, at most, 20 per cent of the choir's music is American.

As at St Paul's in London, the choir at Saint Thomas includes adult males who are professional singers. 'All our men make their livelihood from singing. It's a little bit different here, however. In London, there's a huge pool of choral singers and a lot of the adults in our choir were members of other specialist groups – The Tallis Scholars, Gabrieli Consort or Monteverdi Choir – so they were very busy. St Paul's arrangement with them was that they could be away a good 50 per cent of the time (it was quite a generous allowance) but they had to provide a deputy. I had auditioned all the people on the deputy list, so they were all approved, and all very capable, experienced singers. But it meant that I never knew from day to day who was going to be there, which was a little bit disconcerting and makes it rather difficult to build a house style. That's not the case here in New York, partly because there's simply not the same amount of freelance work for singers. I'm not sure why that should be. It's such a busy city musically in other ways. And I do think that this is starting to change. The early music scene here is getting really interesting. There's a lot happening now. A lot of it is on a very small scale, yes, but even so, it's very well done. In any event, the men in the Saint Thomas Choir are away relatively infrequently, so there's a real sense of continuity from day to day.'

Scott points out with obvious pride that some of New York's most exciting, young early music ensembles have roots at Saint Thomas. 'New York Polyphony is one. All four singers started


'This is repertoire the choir sings every Christmas. People are always asking for a recording, and now we'll have it' – John Scott

off in our choir and one is still here. They do really beautiful work.'

He's also clearly proud of the choir's new relationship with Resonus Classics. Saint Thomas

made recordings with Koch for some years and then, like many ensembles, started an in-house label. 'That was great in terms of freedom,' Scott says, 'but we didn't have the infrastructure. Adam Binks, who is producing our recordings for Resonus, has a similar background to mine. We were both choristers in the cathedral in Wakefield in Yorkshire and were taught by the same organist, Jonathan Bielby.'

The first Resonus release was an in-house recording of Bach's motets that came out last spring. Now, Binks is in New York to record an album of Christmas favourites, including Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols* with Sara Cutler, harpist for the Orchestra of St Luke's, and John Rutter's companion piece *Dancing Day*, as well as some traditional carols. 'It's repertoire the choir sings every Christmas, and we pack the place when we do. People are always asking for a recording, and now we'll have it.'

The challenge, of course, is recording with all the noise that goes along with Saint Thomas's central location. And, of course, those missing windows. 'Under normal conditions it's very difficult to record here. And under these conditions it has been a great test of everyone's endurance and patience. When we recorded on Wednesday, there was a demonstration in Times Square,' Scott recalls with a grim smile. 'So in addition to the subway trains and cars, we had helicopters overhead.' Why not find a quieter location? 'We simply sound the best in our own room, as any group does. Singing at Saint Thomas, we sound as we sound.' 

► To read Gramophone's review, turn to our Christmas Round-up on page 28

Critics' Choice 2015

If you're after gift ideas this Christmas, look no further than our critics' selection of stand-out recordings from the past 12 months

Andrew Achenbach

Vaughan Williams A Pastoral Symphony, etc
Hallé © CDHLL7540 (2/15)



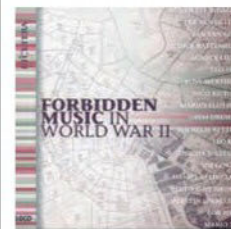
I'm torn between Elder's resplendent Hallé accounts of Vaughan Williams's *Sea* and *Pastoral* Symphonies, and if I gravitate towards the latter,

it's testimony to the slumbering organic power and aching poignancy he distils in this boundlessly compassionate masterpiece. Glorious couplings, too – in my experience, the *Five Variants* has surely never sounded more raptly lyrical.



Tim Ashley

'Forbidden Music in World War II'
Etcetera © KTC1530 (A/15)



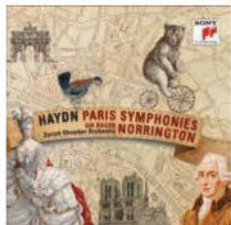
Examining the work of 19 Dutch composers who fought for their lives and integrity during the Nazi occupation, this is both a powerful

historical document and a fine survey of an important body of work seriously overlooked: Henriette Bosons's music, above all, has been, for me, the revelation of the year.

'Okko Kamu's Lahti Sibelius symphony cycle is an essential refresher course' – Rob Cowan

Nalen Anthoni

Haydn Symphonies Nos 82-87, 'Paris'
Sony Classical © 88875 02133-2 (7/15)



Haydn strides, smiles, dances and glows as Roger Norrington abandons erstwhile pedantic restrictions for the infinite possibilities

of sagacious interpretation. Scholastic detail marries artistic spontaneity which may even occasion a few gasps of surprise. Fear not. This set of the 'Paris' Symphonies with the Zurich Chamber Orchestra is undoubtedly a landmark.

Mike Ashman

Beethoven Triple Concerto. Overtures
Sony Classical © 88883 76362-2 (10/15)

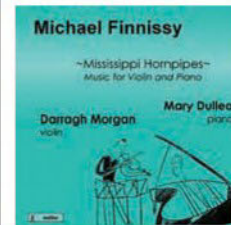


This period-inspired performance of the concerto, with Giovanni Antonini directing the Basle Chamber Orchestra, launches the work afresh after the

erratic balance of modern-instrument versions and (much thanks to Sol Gabetta's cello) digs deeper into the more serious colours of the music than many a competitor. You can hear *Fidelio* just around the corner, as well as merrymaking in the country.

Philip Clark

Finnissy Mississippi Hornpipes
Métier © MSV28545 (9/15)

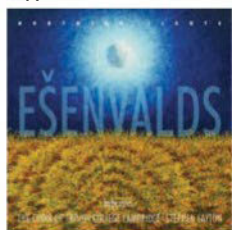


Six recent(ish) Finnissy pieces, ranging from the blink-and-you'll-miss-it *Jive* to the complex post-Brahmsian interweaving of lines of a 20-minute Violin

Sonata (played by Darragh Morgan, violin, and Mary Dullea, piano) to a Dadaist piece with a title too long to print here. Finnissy, as ever, poses vital questions about classical music – what should pieces contain? How should we listen?

Alexandra Coghlan

Ešēnvalds Northern Lights
Hyperion Ⓢ CDA68083 (3/15)

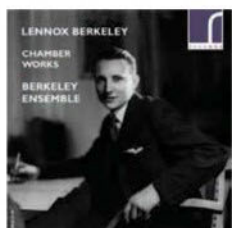


Outrageously, exhaustingly beautiful, this disc pairs the best of Latvia's contemporary choral composers with the best of young British

choirs. Stephen Layton and the Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge, do Ešēnvalds proud in recordings which suffuse his generously tonal music with light while simultaneously anchoring it with depth of sonority.

Peter Dickinson

L Berkeley String Trio, Op 19. Sextet, Op 47. Introduction and Allegro, Op 80, etc
Resonus Ⓢ RES10149 (9/15)

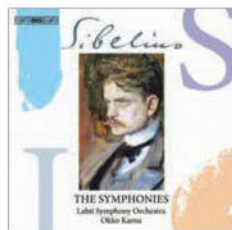


The outstanding young Berkeley Ensemble has gained first-rate reviews for this, their second CD – all well deserved.

The String Trio is an early masterpiece; the Sextet not far off and the student work, Sonatine for clarinet and piano, is a real discovery. A most enjoyable collection in every way.

Rob Cowan

Sibelius Symphonies Nos 1-7
BIS Ⓢ ③ BIS2076 (12/15)



Okko Kamu's Lahti Sibelius symphony cycle is an essential refresher course: the way newly revealed woodwind lines energise the Second's first

movement, or the clarity among lower voices in the Third and, in the Seventh, the organic growth from initial doubt to equivocal triumph. Osmo Vänskä – with the same orchestra – was good, but Kamu is great.

Jed Distler

Jean Martinon 'Chicago Symphony Orchestra: The Complete Recordings'
RCA Red Seal Ⓢ ⑩ 88843 06275-2 (3/15)

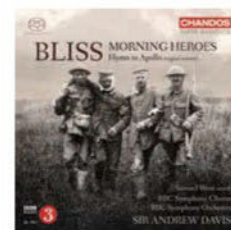


The CSO made some of its most musically stunning and sonically crisp recordings with the underrated Jean Martinon during his brief tenure as Music Director.

Every selection in this 10-disc set stands as a version of reference, from the best-ever Nielsen Symphony No 4 and Varèse *Arcana* to ravishing Ravel, Roussel, Bartók and Bizet.

Jeremy Dibble

Bliss Morning Heroes
Chandos Ⓢ CHSA5159 (11/15)



Sir Charles Grove's EMI recording in the 1970s made a considerable impact, and there was a '90s version from Michael Kibblewhite, but this new interpretation

from Sir Andrew Davis and BBC Symphony forces combines intensity with heartfelt tenderness, both of which capture the personal loss Bliss felt upon his brother's death. Samuel West makes a magnificent narrator.

'The Tallis Scholars give a beautifully measured performance of one of the Renaissance's greatest masterpieces' – David Fallows

Adrian Edwards

Martinů Rhapsody-Concerto. Three Madrigals. Duo No 2. Viola Sonata
BIS Ⓢ ⑥ BIS2030 (6/15)

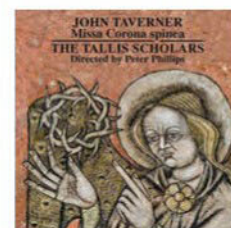


Maxim Rysanov's radiant viola playing catches the Bohemian spirit that runs through his Martinů programme, with the BBCSO lending generous

support in the glorious *Rhapsody-Concerto*; Rysanov's contemporaries, violinist Alexander Sitkovetsky and pianist Katya Apekisheva, do so in the contrasting chamber works. The front cover of the CD, a sepia photograph of Martinů wearing a beret holding his cat in his arms, is an endearing touch.

David Fallows

Taverner Missa Corona spinea
Gimell Ⓢ CDGIMO46 (11/15)



This recording is a beautifully measured performance of one of Renaissance music's greatest masterpieces. Under Peter Phillips, The Tallis Scholars

have been delivering 16th-century polyphony at a very high technical level for more than 40 years – long may they continue.

Richard Fairman

'Joyce and Tony' Live at Wigmore Hall
Erato Ⓢ ② 2564 61078-9 (9/15)

This duo recital with 'Joyce and Tony' seems even better on disc than it did live. Was DiDonato really so gripping in Haydn, so ravishing in songs by the long-forgotten Santoliquido? And what a dream team she

and Pappano make in hits from the Great American Songbook. Listen back with nostalgia. Or just discover and marvel.



PHOTOGRAPHY: RUSSELL HART, SIMON JAY PRICE

David Fanning

Bach Goldberg Variations **Beethoven** Diabelli Variations **Rzewski** The People United Will Never Be Defeated!
Sony Classical (Ⓢ) 88875 06096-2 (11/15)



Igor Levit's three-disc set of Bach, Beethoven and Rzewski is outstanding not just for its artistry but also for its conception.

Approach it with scepticism about Rzewski's credentials in such company, and you may find yourself having to rethink by the end.

Caroline Gill

Bach Brandenburg Concertos
Channel Classics (Ⓢ) CCSSA35914 (1/15)



This performance by Florilegium is a rarity in the overwhelming proliferation of accomplished recordings of these masterworks.

Not only is it full of all the joy that Bach was capable of writing, but it displays all the detailed, sensitive interpretative consideration and technical perfection that can forge a lifelong relationship with a single recording.

Lindsay Kemp

Vivaldi 12 Violin Concertos, Op 3, 'L'estro armonico'
Channel Classics (Ⓢ) 2 CCSSA36515 (4/15)



I've had no difficulty in choosing my favourite this year: Rachel Podger's exhilarating meeting of minds with Vivaldi's *L'estro armonico*

concertos (leading her own ensemble Brecon Baroque) is not only a vivid reminder of what makes this oft-belittled composer such a force, it's also a perfect showcase for surely one of the most naturally inspiring and engaging personalities in Baroque music-making today.



Fabrice Fitch

'Au saint Nau'
Alpha (Ⓢ) ALPHA198 (2/15)



Highlights of my year include Lassus from Cinquéciento, Compère from the Orlando Consort, and music by contemporary composer Philippe

Leroux; but my final choice goes to the versatile, jubilant Christmas offering from Dominique Visse and his merry men, which missed the *Gramophone* Early Music award by just one vote. It's marvellous.

David Gutman

Rachmaninov 'Variations'
DG (Ⓢ) 479 4970GH (9/15)



Having persuaded past master Grigory Sokolov to release solo recital material if not actually to 'make records' in 2015,

DG also initiated studio sessions with Daniil Trifonov, the Wunderkind of the moment. I'm choosing youth over experience because Trifonov so completely nails a personal favourite, Rachmaninov's subtly astringent *Corelli* Variations.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Bach/Sitkovetsky Goldberg Variations
Harmonia Mundi (Ⓢ) HMU80 7633 (4/15)

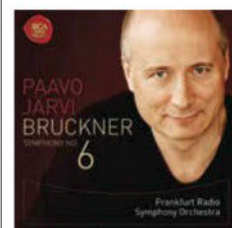


Dmitry Sitkovetsky's transcription of the *Goldbergs* has never appeared so jam-packed with character, colour and richness of dialogue than in the Britten

Sinfonia's perspicacious reading. Led dazzlingly by Thomas Gould, the narrative of Bach's titanic set is endlessly infused with original delights, luminously reimagining the potential of Sitkovetsky's elusive model.

Christian Hoskins

Bruckner Symphony No 6
RCA Red Seal (Ⓢ) 88875 13126-2 (A/15)



Although I was greatly impressed by Jaap van Zweden's account of Bruckner's First Symphony, my pick of the year has to be this recording

of the Sixth Symphony by Paavo Järvi and the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, an interpretation of unsurpassed insight and assurance from *Gramophone's* newly anointed Artist of the Year.



PHOTOGRAPHY: K. MURA

Philip Kennicott

Berg Lyric Suite **Wellesz** Sonnets by Elizabeth Barrett Browning
Zeisl Komm, susser Tod
 Decca © 478 8399 (10/15)



After a gripping account of Berg's *Lyric Suite*, and welcome attention to Egon Wellesz's haunting *Sonnets by Elizabeth Browning* (for string quartet and soprano), Renée Fleming offers an arrangement of Zeisl's song *Komm, susser Tod*. These are three minutes of pure loveliness, and they cast a twilight glow over this wintry landscape of loss and desolation.

Richard Lawrence

Mozart Die Zauberflöte
 Testament © SBT2 1504 (7/15)



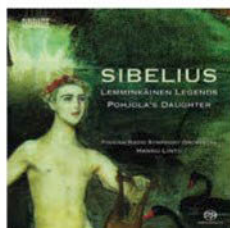
This is another wonderful dip into the archives: the first night of a new production at the ROH in 1962 under Otto Klemperer. Apart from Hans Hotter, a magisterial Speaker, the cast is home-grown. Lovely performances from Joan Carlyle, Richard Lewis and Geraint Evans. Bravo, Testament; but what has become of Covent Garden's own Heritage Series?

'Martland's compositional voice is brought vividly to life by a stellar cast of performers, beautifully recorded' – Ivan Moody



Andrew Mellor

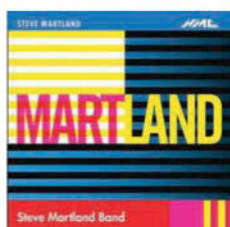
Sibelius Lemminkäinen Legends
 Ondine © ODE1262-5 (7/15)



If you'd asked me in January what Sibelius I'd want to hear newly minted for old Jean's 150th, I'd have said the *Lemminkäinen Legends*. I don't agree with all of Hannu Lintu's decisions, but it's thrilling to hear Sibelius's most remarkable structures from an orchestra under impassioned leadership that's probably never sounded better.

Ivan Moody

Martland Shoulder to Shoulder. American Invention, etc
 NMC © ② NMCD210 (11/15)



This is an outstanding memorial to Steve Martland's unique talent, including such significant works as *Shoulder to Shoulder* and *American Invention*, and lesser-known pieces such as the lovely, lyrical *Mr Anderson's Pavane*. Martland's compositional voice is brought vividly to life by a stellar cast of performers, beautifully recorded by NMC.

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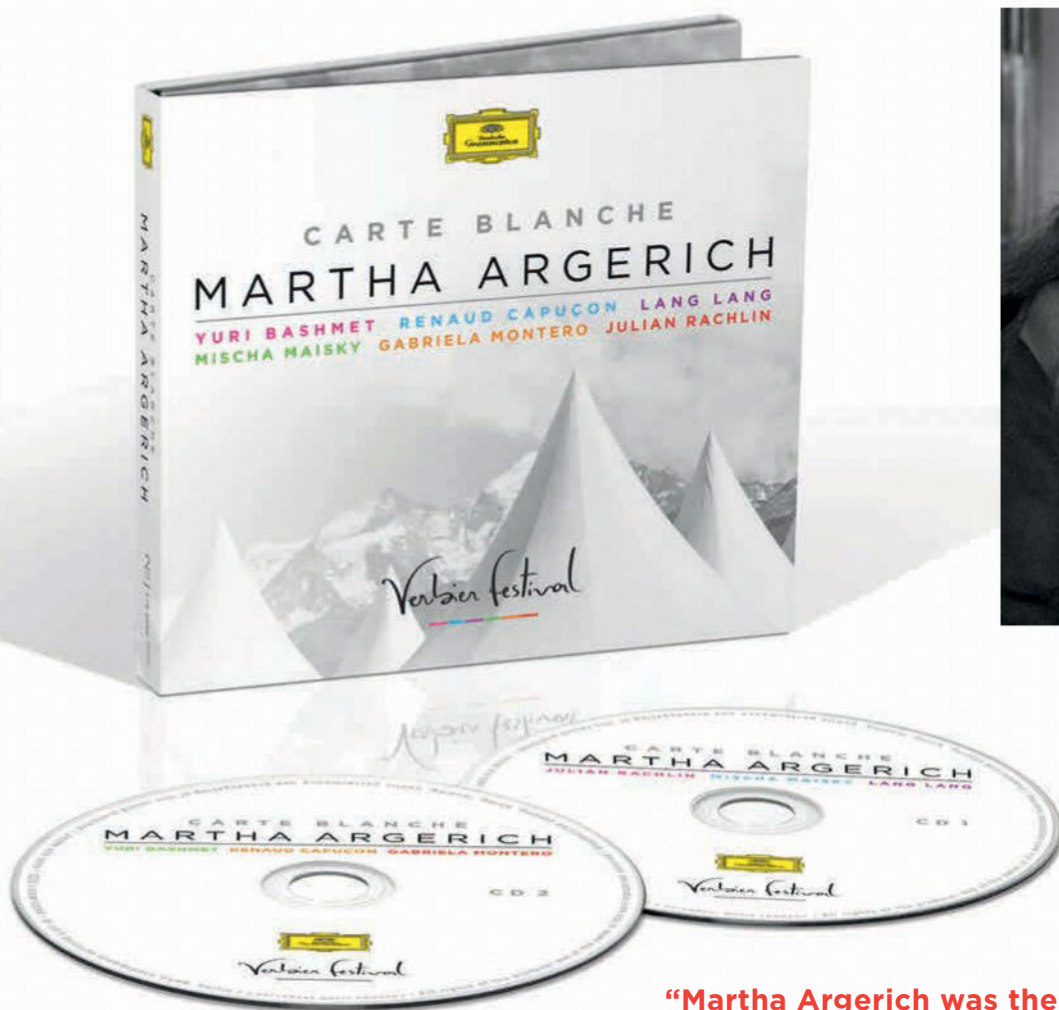


Photo © Adriano Heitmann

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Michael Church

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Bryce Morrison

Stephen Kovacevich

'The Complete Philips Recordings'

Decca © (25 discs) 478 866-2 (10/15)



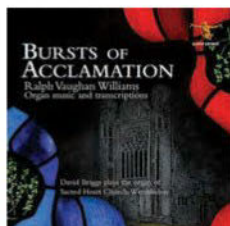
No hesitations here. Stephen Kovacevich's 25-CD album confirms his status among the most serious and deeply committed

musicians of our time. Richly comprehensive and lavishly presented, these recordings – dating from 1968-85 – range through late Beethoven, Mozart, Chopin, Schumann, Brahms, Grieg and Richard Rodney Bennett.

Christopher Nickol

Vaughan Williams 'Bursts of Acclamation'

Albion (M) ② ALBCD021/2 (10/15)



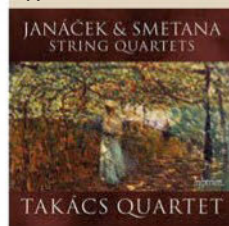
It's a cause for celebration that one of the world's finest organists should apply his virtuosity to Vaughan Williams's glorious compositions.

David Briggs's lovingly crafted performances give us music-making of the highest order. Coupled with the magnificent sounds of the vintage Walker organ at Sacred Heart Church, Wimbledon, this is a CD to treasure.

Hannab Nepil

Janáček String Quartets Nos 1 & 2

Hyperion © CDA67997 (10/15)



There's no sign of half measures in these Janáček string quartets. The Takács players throw themselves unreservedly into the music's

abrasive sound world, emotional U-turns and rhythmic gearshifts, all in the name of naked instinct. Yet not a semiquaver seems to go by unscrutinised.



Jeremy Nicholas

Moszkowski, Grieg Piano Concertos

Onyx © ONYX4144 (9/15)



For historic piano devotees nothing came close this year to the complete recordings of Vassily Sapelnikoff and Xaver Scharwenka on APR but, for a

present-day pianist with all the attributes of an earlier era, then *Gramophone's* new Young Artist of the Year Joseph Moog's scintillating take (superbly recorded) on Moszkowski's Piano Concerto proves an unmissable treat.

Geoffrey Norris

Scriabin, Medtner Piano Concertos

BIS © BIS2088 (3/15)



Coupled with a fine performance of Medtner's No 3, Sudbin's Scriabin recognises that there is in the Piano Concerto, for all its Romantic

legacy, a restless, rhythmically free quality that it is unwise to tie down, an evanescence of ideas and shapes that necessitate a lightness of touch in order to become truly airborne.

Richard Osborne

Verdi Aida

Warner Classics (M) ③ 2564 61066-3 (A/15)



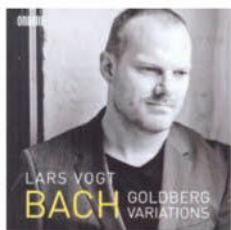
Antonio Pappano's new set of Verdi's *Aida* is an unusually fine performance, arguably the best all-round *Aida* the gramophone has yet given us. It is

also a reminder that there is no better place to relish the wonders of this exquisite score than in the privacy of one's own home.



Stephen Plaistow

Bach Goldberg Variations
Online ⑥ ODE12732 (A/15)

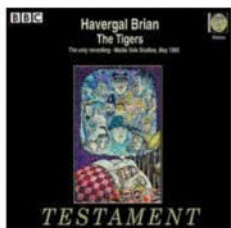


A distinguished addition to the discography of piano versions of the *Goldberg Variations*. Their glorious elegance is everywhere manifest

and Lars Vogt makes us celebrate the work as an extraordinary monument, as of course all players must. I particularly warm to the way he takes delight in all its aspects and challenges and conveys a sense of the pleasure it must have been for Bach to write.

Guy Rickards

Brian The Tigers
Testament ⑥ SBT3 1496 (4/15)

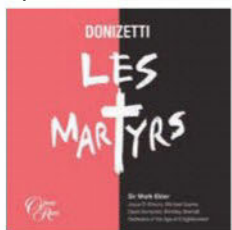


Three issues vied for top spot: Deborah Pritchard's fabulous violin concerto *Wall of Water* (5/15) and two by Havergal Brian – *Wine of Summer*

and other symphonies (6/15), and the compelling, Goon-like comic opera *The Tigers*, with its huge cast – 20 soloists singing 57 roles, plus chorus. Testament's remastering of the 1983 BBC recording is superbly vivid.

Mark Pullinger

Donizetti Les martyrs
Opera Rara ⑥ ③ ORC52 (6/15)

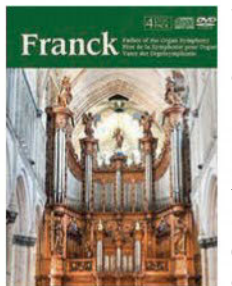


In a year when many 'rediscovered' Donizetti's *Poliuto* at Glyndebourne, his Parisian rewrite – *Les martyrs* – was even more revelatory. Operatic

archaeologists Opera Rara's studio recording, in conjunction with a concert performance, is thrilling. Sir Mark Elder conducts the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment with verve, and Michael Spyres and Joyce El-Khoury lead a stylish cast.

Malcolm Riley

Franck 'The Father of the Organ Symphony'
Fugue State Films ⑥ ④ DVD FSFDVD009 (5/15)



What a boon the recent trend for crowd-funded recording projects has been. Organists responded warmly to Fugue State Films' Cavallé-Coll project (4/13); this year's Franck offering has similarly

given many hours of audio and visual delight. Generously filled with painstaking attention to visiting the historically correct instruments, this *tour de force* is unlikely to be surpassed.

Peter Quantrill

Stravinsky The Rite of Spring
RCA Red Seal ⑥ 88843 09546-2 (4/15)

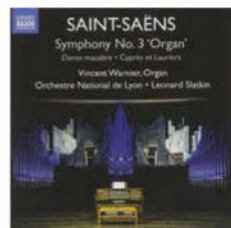


In word and sound, David Zinman presents a primer to the many faces of *The Rite*, but this isn't a strictly academic comparison between a previously unheard

'autograph' version and Stravinsky's final thoughts: he is no less a virtuoso conductor than was his teacher and *The Rite*'s first conductor, Pierre Monteux. These *Rites* are as vivid and transparent as Roerich's original designs, and all the more revelatory for it.

Marc Rochester

Saint-Saëns Symphony No 3, 'Organ'
Naxos ③ 8 573331 (5/15)



There will be questions about my sanity (such as it is) when I claim Leonard Slatkin's understated account of the Saint-Saëns *Organ* Symphony to be the supreme CD version of recent years. But by its very under-statedness as well as the engineers' easy integration of the Lyon organ, played by Vincent Warnier, and Orchestre National de Lyon, it oozes supreme sensitivity and stylistic sincerity.

Harriet Smith

Bach Goldberg Variations Beethoven Diabelli Variations Rzewski The People United Will Never Be Defeated!
Sony Classical ⑥ ③ 88875 06096-2 (11/15)



Had Igor Levit been born in the Age of Chivalry he would no doubt have been a triumphant slayer of dragons. As a citizen of the 21st century his

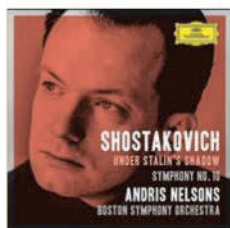
quest seems to be to conquer the greatest keyboard music before reaching his 30th birthday. In his hands, the unlikely triptych of Bach's *Goldbergs*, Beethoven's *Diabellis* and Rzewski's wondrous *The People United* is simply spellbinding.



PHOTOGRAPHY: GREGOR HOENBERG

Edward Seckerson

Shostakovich Symphony No 10
DG 479 5059 (8/15)



It's always exciting when a new recording of an established classic sweeps away competition even as you are listening to it. In his debut recording with the Boston Symphony, Andris Nelsons delivers a stunning performance of Shostakovich's before-and-after-Stalin Tenth. Rhythm is his lethal weapon, precision his strength. Brooding, tense, febrile, thrilling.

Hugo Shirley

Schoenberg Gurrelieder
Hyperion 2 CDA68081/2 (5/15)



A *Gurrelieder* on the cusp: Schoenberg's vast cantata not only looks back to lush Romanticism, but looks forward with clear sight into the bright dawn of modernism. Beautifully controlled by Markus Stenz, with impeccable singing from excellent soloists and virtuoso playing from the Gürzenich-Orchester, it's a revelatory release.

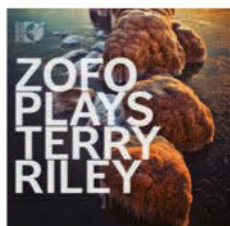
'It's always exciting when a new recording of a classic sweeps away competition even as you are listening'

— Edward Seckerson



Pwyll ap Siôn

'ZOFO Plays Terry Riley'
Sono Luminus DSL92189 (A/15)



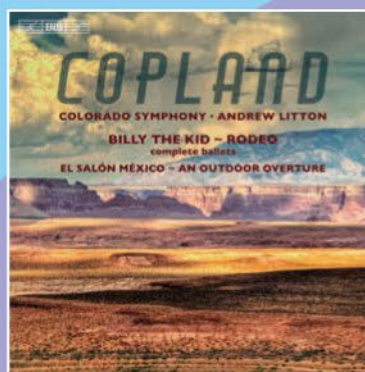
Sceptics of Riley's recent music should check out this recording of his compositions for piano duet. ZOFO (aka pianists Eva-Maria Zimmermann and Keisuke Nakagoshi) stands for '20-finger orchestra', and the piano springs to brilliant life here, from *Etude from the Old Country* to the funky, freewheeling *Cinco de Mayo*. Electrifying stuff.

David Patrick Stearns

Lutosławski Piano Concerto. Symphony No 2
DG 479 4518 (9/15)



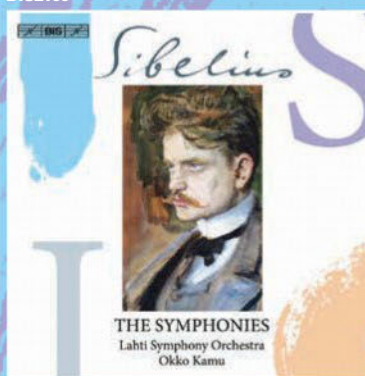
Without prompting from an anniversary, Witold Lutosławski receives deluxe treatment here, yielding significant perceptual advances. What was once mysterious or even obscure is now music of wonder in the 1988 Piano Concerto, especially in Zimerman's hands. But the aleatoric, 1967 Symphony No 2 is much more transformed by Rattle from the more blended, Impressionistic Esa-Pekka Salonen (Sony Classical) or the composer's own tentative recording (EMI) into something blazingly audacious.



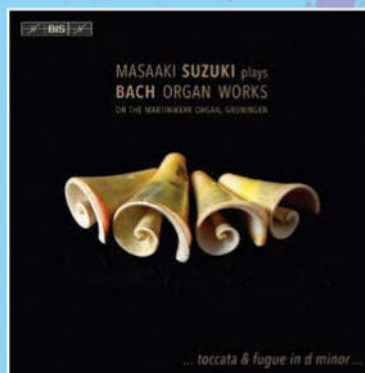
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Adès *The Tempest* 21, 25, 28 May, 1 June

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Reimann *Lear* 29, 31 May

Verdi *Falstaff* 20, 22 May | *Macbeth* 22, 26 May | *Otello* 24, 27 May

Seregi – Goldmark *The Taming of the Shrew* (ballet) 18, 20 May

Britten *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 27, 28 May

Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra Symphonic Evening – conductor ► **Arthur Fagen** 30 May

And many more...

15
20
16

David Threasher

Vivaldi The New Four Seasons
Sony Classical (P) 88875 07672-2 (12/15)

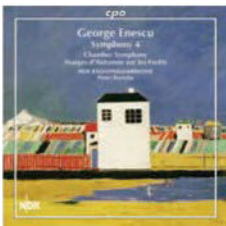


While Adrian Chandler's firebrand authenticity on Avie presents Vivaldi's evergreen concertos as nearly as the composer himself might have heard

them, Nigel Kennedy's unique outlook on the work, honed over a quarter of a century's experience and insight, results in something Vivaldi couldn't even have imagined. Like it or not, it's like nothing you've ever heard before.

Richard Whitehouse

Enescu Symphony No 4. Chamber Symphony. Nuages d'Automne sur les Forêts
CPO (P) 777 966-2 (12/15)



Enescu's unfinished Fourth and Fifth Symphonies were realised two decades ago by composer Pascal Bentoiu and Peter Ruzicka has now recorded the

Fourth, a powerfully argued piece which ranks high among mid-20th-century symphonies. Coupled with the finest modern account of the valedictory Chamber Symphony, this is a mandatory purchase.

David Vickers

Steffani Niobe
Erato (M) 3 2564 63435-4 (3/15)



This Bostonian production of *Niobe* (Munich, 1688), deservedly Recording of the Month in March, was praised as 'a landmark event

in Steffani's much-deserved rehabilitation'. The routinely fantastic cast and Boston Early Music Festival orchestra conspire with the directorial team of Paul O'Dette and Stephen Stubbs to make this an exceptionally perfect recording.

Arnold Whittall

Birtwistle Songs 1970-2006
Toccata Classics (P) TOCC0281 (9/15)



This attractive selection of Harrison Birtwistle's shorter vocal and instrumental pieces highlights the special lyric eloquence and

dramatic intensity of his smaller-scale compositions, sustained for more than 30 years. Linked to an 80th birthday event in Germany, and with a revealing interview thrown in, it's the ideal introduction to a modern British master.

John Warrack

Stravinsky Concertante piano works
Chandos (P) CHSA5147 (2/15)



A clever idea of Jean-Efflam Bavouzet to gather on a record centring on Stravinsky as pianist three major works, the Concerto, confronting if not

reconciling Baroque and tango within a classical framework; the multi-serialist *Mouvements*, hard as a diamond; and the enjoyable *Capriccio*, also acknowledging the piano origins of *Petrushka*.

William Yeoman

'Heard this and thought of you'
ABC Classics (M) 481 1874



The idea is as sweet as its elaboration is surprising: some of Australia's finest writers respond to various works as a 'heard this and thought of you' letter.

The music ranges from the Renaissance to the present day; the writers range from Helen Garner to Michael Leunig. The performances by Genevieve Lacey (recorders) and James Crabb (classical accordion) feel intimate and spontaneous; the letters doubly so.

Richard Wigmore

'Scene!' Scenas by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Mendelssohn
Berlin Classics (P) 0300646BC (7/15)



Always an exciting singer, Christiane Karg brings fire, grace and intense involvement to these assorted heroines *in extremis*, not least in her

fearless account of Mendelssohn's over-the-top Mozartian pastiche. Everything she does is specific, individual, alive, while the players of Arcangelo match her all the way in dramatic flair.





Festival cheer: the Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge, and conductor Stephen Layton gather round to record their 'Yulefest!' album

It's beginning to sound a lot like Christmas

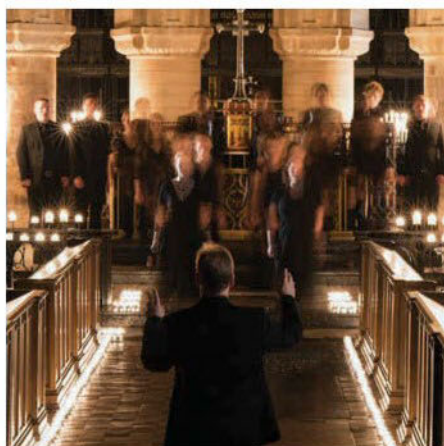
What better way to welcome in the festive season than with a suitably atmospheric CD playing in your living room? David Thresher guides you through this year's seasonal offerings

The nights are drawing in, the whiff of bonfires is giving way to roasting chestnuts and we're all beginning to don scarves and woolly hats to await the first fall of snow. Meanwhile, throughout the year, singers and organists have been eagerly putting together that other vital ingredient for the perfect festive season – the Christmas CD. This beast falls generally into three categories, all represented in this round-up: the collegiate or cathedral choir with its own individual repertoire; the themed collection carefully selected by a go-ahead director with a crack professional or semi-professional ensemble; and the large-scale Christmas work.

This latter category is headed, of course, by Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* (see the review of Peter Dijkstra's Bavarian recording on page 81) but there are plenty of lesser-known Christmas cantatas that will be new to many and good to hear in a rare recorded outing. One such is *Lauda per la Natività del Signore*, Respighi's only sacred work, composed in 1930. This tells the Nativity story from the point of view

of the shepherds, the angel and Mary herself; accompaniment is provided by a woodwind sextet, which lends an entirely apt pastoral note to the work, while four hands at a single piano add grandeur at the 'Gloria' peroration. The Berlin Radio Choir sing it as if they've been doing so for years and, among the soloists, Yeree Suh's soprano floats ethereally above this fascinating discovery. Prefacing it is a meditative sequence of standalone works (Sandström, Lauridsen, etc), thrown into sharp contrast by Poulenc's *Quatre Motets pour le temps de Noël*.

Another discovery is **Hugo Distler's** (1908-42) *Die Weihnachtsgeschichte*, a 43-minute unaccompanied setting largely of St Luke's account of the Nativity. This is a real challenge for a choir, and one that's admirably met by the Athesinus Consort Berlin. Placed in context by a series of Distler's motets in a late-Romantic style, the cantata is more harmonically adventurous and is punctuated by cumulatively harmonised verses of *Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen*. The Evangelist, Thomas Volle, is less



Blend and shine: Nigel Short and Tenebrae

persuasive, with his rather quavery tenor, although the other soloists are fine.

For those who like something new for Christmas, two of the Cambridge choirs offer sequences of carols either of recent vintage or reimagined in new colours.

Nova! Nova! is a selection of carols composed over the past decade, many recorded here for the first time. The mixed choir come from St Catharine's and acquit themselves well in some tricky music in the lustrous wood surroundings of the college's little chapel, even if the men are not the most mellifluous among the Cambridge ensembles. The disc takes its name from James MacMillan's anthem and includes works by composers perhaps not normally associated with Christmas, among them Tansy Davies, Christopher Fox and Stevie Wishart; highlights include Giles Swayne's *There is no rose*, Cecilia McDowall's *Before the paling of the stars* and Sally Beamish's closing *In the stillness*. The presence of St Catharine's Girls' Choir – unique among the top collegiate institutions – offers pleasant contrast to the mixed adult voices.

Altogether lighter-hearted, yet no less serious, is **Yulefest!** from Trinity College, Cambridge. Stephen Layton's sequence is palpably a 'curated' collection, ranging from the sublime to the faintly ridiculous but presented with such precision and nuance that it really doesn't matter. There's a lot from the Baltic and beyond, this being a speciality of Layton's, and enough to maintain the interest – although, between Ben Parry's Swingle-ish 'Jingle bells' which opens the disc and the antepenultimate 'Sleigh ride' (the ubiquitous Leroy Anderson Thanksgiving work given a Vaughan Williams makeover by Robert Rice), a string of soupy (in the best possible way) arrangements barely breaks into a sweat. A slightly more austere note is struck in works such as Paul Manz's *E'en so, Lord Jesus*, and it's good to hear Reginald Jacques's *Away in a manger* for a change. Highlights include Bror Samuelson's *Ave maris stella* and a new version of *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day* by 22-year-old Owain Park. Step-out soloists add lustre: among them, the mezzos Anna Cavaliero and Helen Charlston and the tenor Cameron Richardson-Eames please particularly.

More modern carols come from America's West Coast. Capella SF's **Light of Gold** mixes new and old, with a couple of well-known Willcocks arrangements of traditional carols alongside a



The Queen's College Choir in the chapel of Keble College, Oxford

Capella SF's 'Light of Gold' album mixes both new and old... These are well-drilled performances, and beautifully shaped

soprano. The gem here is *How Bright the Darkness* by Luna Pearl Woolf (b1973), while the biggest surprise comes from John Corigliano's utterly loopy *Christmas at the Cloisters* for baritone and Hammond organ.

What of something more traditional? **King's College, Cambridge**, lay fair claim to being the archetypal sound of Christmas but their CD offering at the moment is a Gabrieli disc (see page 83). There is, however, a DVD immortalising the 2014 Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols (as seen on the BBC and throughout the world last Christmas Eve), the all-important treble soloist in *Once in Royal David's City* being Gabriel May. The package also includes the documentary *60 Years of Carols from King's*, which goes behind the cameras past and present to tell the riveting story of this international stalwart of the season.

Something more traditional comes from the banks not of the Cam but of the Cherwell. **Carols from Queen's** offers a programme mainly of the usual suspects, spiced with a couple of more modern works. Like Catz and Trinity, The Queen's College, Oxford, has a mixed choir of undergraduates, but their somewhat breathy sopranos lead to an 'airy' overall sound that seems somewhat lacking in body within the glowing acoustic of Keble's lovely Victorian Gothic chapel. Queen's strengths lie not in the corporate sound but with individuals: there is some excellent solo soprano work, while George Parris leads off Queen's own carol, *The Boar's Head*, with infectious baritone vigour, only to be met with a frustratingly flaccid choral response; Robert Holbrook shades his voice exquisitely between verses of Cornelius's *The Three Kings*. The impression is of a choir – one that bills itself



The mixed choir of St Catharine's College, Cambridge, impress in 'Nova! Nova!'

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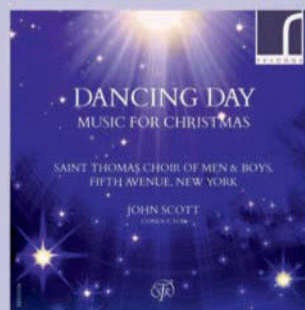
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DANCING DAY
MUSIC FOR CHRISTMAS
Saint Thomas Choir of Men & Boys,
Fifth Avenue, New York
John Scott (conductor)

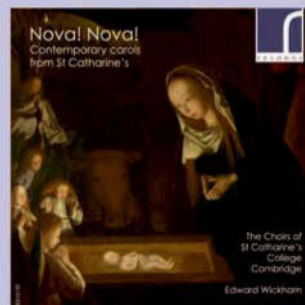
John Scott's final recording with his
superlative New York choir, featuring
Britten's iconic *A Ceremony of Carols*
and John Rutter's companion work
Dancing Day along with carols from
William Mathias, Patrick Hadley,
Matthew Martin & John Scott.



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NOVA! NOVA!
The Choirs of St Catharine's
College, Cambridge
Edward Wickham (conductor)

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to present a stunning programme of
contemporary carols with many world
premieres. This is also the very first
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as being 'among the finest university choirs in the UK' – that is frustratingly less than the sum of its considerable parts. Remember the recording of Handel's *Dixit Dominus* (8/13) from the same choir? That disc demonstrated that these singers can afford to be more adventurous.

Back to Cambridge for **Christmas from Christ's**, a programme of English carols – Warlock, Holst and Vaughan Williams – although Christ's undergraduates in fact crossed the open-air market and passed the Corn Exchange to record in the Chapel of Queens' (Catz' neighbour institution). Less refined than Queen's, Oxford, this is a stouter-sounding choir – especially the sopranos – perhaps even a touch too beefy for the beautiful *Bethlehem Down*, although their sound seems more suited to *A Cornish Christmas Carol*, both from the Warlock set. The sequence works well, bar some rather tentative solos.

Many of the Warlock numbers also feature in a set on **A Very English Christmas** from Nigel Short's Tenebrae. Their usual blend is a given, and the quality of soloists upon whom an ensemble of this calibre can call is also to be expected: Grace Davidson shines particularly in several numbers. The familiar – in arrangements by the likes of Philip Ledger and Simon Preston – mixes with the less so, with particular treats including Richard Knight's *Come rock his cradle* and John Gardner's wonderful *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day*, here without its optional percussion obbligato.

The Cambridge choral tradition has continued in the US, thanks to the advocacy of John Scott, organ scholar at St John's, then organist at St Paul's Cathedral and latterly Director of Music at Saint Thomas, Fifth Avenue (see our feature on page 16). His sudden death earlier this year makes **Dancing Day** perhaps the most poignant of all these discs and bears testament to his phenomenal musicianship and taste. The choir is absolutely secure from trebles to basses and Saint Thomas's organ is in fine voice, as demonstrated in the opening *Novo profusi gaudio* by the Oxford-based composer Matthew Martin. The two major works are Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols* and Rutter's piquant arrangements of traditional tunes, *Dancing Day*; kudos in both to the boys and to harpist Sara Cutler. (An alternative recording of the Britten is offered by the Mädchenchor Hannover with harpist Birgit Bachhuber and director Gudrun Schröfel – Rondeau Production – but the German girls can't match the open-throated lustiness of the New York boys.) Nods back towards Cambridge include, again, Ledger's arrangement of the *Sussex Carol* and Patrick Hadley's *I sing of a maiden*, and it's good to hear William Mathias's *Wassail Carol*, giving a welcome fillip to the reputation of a major composer in danger of slipping from the repertoire (at least outside his native Wales) less than a quarter of a century after his death. Of all the discs in this round-up, it is Saint Thomas's that has given most consistent pleasure.

Swinging from the sublime to the ridiculous again – funny how that's forgivable at Christmas, isn't it? – Renée Fleming celebrates **Christmas in New York**, with cosy chats and collaborations with friends. On this DVD – a follow-on from the CD version released last year – La Fleming croons away to jazzy arrangements of (mainly American) ditties, all mikes and plucked double basses. Everything about it set the teeth on edge...until I pressed play and was won over by the relaxed enjoyment of all concerned (Kurt Elling, Rufus Wainwright, Gergory Porter). The *Rusalka de nos jours* may have been slumming it but there's something that's ultimately so...so strangely authentic about it. And isn't singing with friends such an important part of Christmas? It's a Broadway Christmas, no mistake, but nothing jars – and the musicianship is as perfect as








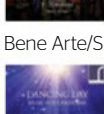
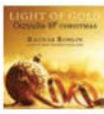



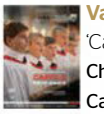

the teeth, the hair and the cheekbones. I'm deeply allergic to saccharine but, against all my prejudiced expectations, nothing cloyed, except perhaps Wainwright breathing in all the wrong places in Harold Darke's *In the bleak midwinter*, accompanied by two guitars. Even *Have yourself a merry little Christmas* (with Porter) for once sounded almost merry. Go Renée!

Not so Plácido Domingo, whose disc **My Christmas** features a string of Disneyfied arrangements on which he duets with the likes of Hayley Westenra, Jackie Evancho and The Piano Guys. The whole thing can't be saved either from Hollywood tackiness or Domingo's idiosyncratic English enunciation by cameos from his own Young Artist Program at LA Opera, not to mention the inclusion of the extremely un-Christmassy 'Pie Jesu from *Requiem*' (Andrew Lloyd Webber's, as it turns out) and a woefully overblown *Ave verum corpus* (Mozart). Not this year, thanks, Plácido.

No, for a real Christmas treat, turn to **Let the Angels Sing**, a collection of mainly well-known European carols in arrangements by conductor Michael Bojesen for the Danish National Vocal Ensemble (with near-faultless English) and the recorder arabesques of Michala Petri. Another surprise and another satisfying disc. A very merry Christmas to all our readers. **G**

THE CHRISTMAS LIST

Your guide to the season's Christmas recordings

	Respighi Lauda per la Natività del Signore Berlin Rad Chor / Sirmais Carus (F) CARUS83 473		Various Cpsrs 'Carols from Queen's' Ch of The Queen's Coll, Oxford / Rees Avie (F) AV2345
	H Distler Die Weihnachtsgeschichte Athesinus Consort Berlin / Bresgott Carus (F) CARUS83 472		Holst. Vaughan Williams. Warlock 'Christmas from Christ's' Ch of Christ's Coll, Cambridge / Rowland Regent (F) REGCD446
	Various Cpsrs 'Nova! Nova!' Chs of St Catharine's Coll, Cambridge / Wickham Resonus (F) RES10159		Various Cpsrs 'A Very English Christmas' Tenebrae / Short Bene Arte/Signum (F) SIGCD902
	Various Cpsrs 'Yulefest!' Ch of Trinity Coll, Cambridge / Layton Hyperion (F) CDA68087		Various Cpsrs 'Dancing Day' St Thomas Ch of Men & Boys / Scott Resonus (F) RES10158
	Various Cpsrs 'Light of Gold' Cappella SF / Bohlin Delos (F) DE3485		Various Cpsrs 'Christmas in New York' Fleming and friends Decca (F) DVD 074 3897
	Various Cpsrs 'December Celebration' Volti Chor; New Century CO / Harms Pentatone (F) PTC5186 537		Various Cpsrs 'My Christmas' Domingo et al Sony (F) 88875 11743-2
	Various Cpsrs 'Carols from King's' Ch of King's Coll, Cambridge / Cleobury King's College (F) DVD KGS0013		Various Cpsrs 'Let the Angels Sing' Petri; Danish Nat Voc Ens / Bojesen OUR Recordings (F) 6 220615



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<i>Bucharest</i>	Le Grand Prix d'Opera International Singing Competition	<i>Porcia</i>	Concours International «Città di Porcia»
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<i>Fort Worth</i>	Van Cliburn International Piano Competition	<i>Shenzhen</i>	China Shenzhen International Piano Competition
<i>Geneva*</i>	Concours de Genève	<i>Sion</i>	Concours International de Violon «Tibor Varga» Sion Valais
<i>Genoa*</i>	International Violin Competition "Premio Paganini"	<i>Sydney</i>	Sydney International Piano Competition of Australia
<i>Glasgow</i>	Scottish International Piano Competition	<i>Takamatsu</i>	The Takamatsu International Piano Competition
<i>Graz</i>	International Competition "Franz Schubert and Modern Music"	<i>Tbilisi</i>	Tbilisi International Piano Competition
<i>Hachioji</i>	Gaspar Cassado International Violoncello Competition	<i>Tel Aviv</i>	The Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition
<i>Hamamatsu</i>	Hamamatsu International piano Competition		Concours International de Piano «Alessandro Casagrande»
<i>Hamamatsu</i>	Shizuoka International Opera Competition	<i>Terni</i>	International Conducting Competition
<i>Hannover</i>	Joseph Joachim International Violin Competition	<i>Tokyo</i>	International Organ Competition Musashino - Tokyo
<i>Helsinki</i>	Mirjam Helin International Singing Competition	<i>Tokyo</i>	Isang Yun International Music Competition
<i>Helsinki</i>	Helsinki International Maj Lind Piano Competition	<i>Tongyeong</i>	Concours International de Chant de la Ville de Toulouse
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<i>Lichtenberg</i>	Henri Marteau International Violin Competition	<i>Vienna</i>	Fritz Kreisler International Violin Competition
<i>Leipzig</i>	International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition	<i>Vilnius</i>	International M.K. Ciurlionis Piano and Organ Competition
<i>Luxembourg</i>	Concours International de Percussion	<i>Viña del Mar</i>	International Musical Competition Dr. Luis Sigall
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<i>Lyon</i>	Concours International de Musique de Chambre - Lyon	<i>Warsaw</i>	Witold Lutoslawski International Cello Competition
<i>Manchester</i>	James Mottram International Piano Competition	<i>Weimar</i>	Weimar International Music Competitions
		<i>Xiamen</i>	China International Piano Competition
		<i>Yerevan</i>	Aram Kachaturian International Competition
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The Belarusian soprano Nadine Koutcher, who won the 2015 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World

UK COMPETITIONS

BBC Cardiff Singer of the World

The 2015 competition was won by Nadine Koutcher of Belarus. Auditions for the 2017 competition are expected to take place during the latter half of 2016. More details, including an application form, will appear on the website in due course.

Next competition June 18-25, 2017
bbc.co.uk

BBC Young Musician of the Year

This biennial competition is open to string, percussion, keyboard, brass and woodwind players aged 18 and under, with a first prize of £2000. The winner in 2014 was 17-year-old pianist Martin James Bartlett, adding to a roster of previous winners including Nicholas Daniel (1980) and Jennifer Pike (2002). The last competition also saw the

introduction of a Jazz Award, which was won by 17-year-old saxophonist Alexander Bone. This award returns in 2016 with the age limit raised to 21.

Next competition March 6 - May 15, 2016 (regional auditions now over)
Watch The final will be broadcast on BBC Television

bbc.co.uk

The Donatella Flick LSO Conducting Competition

Established in 1990, this biennial competition aims to launch the careers of conductors aged under 35 from EU countries. The final is held at the Barbican Hall, where the three finalists conduct the London Symphony Orchestra. The winner in 2014 was Elim Chan, and previous winners include David Afkham (2008) and François-Xavier Roth (2000).

Next competition November 15-17, 2016 (application deadline April 21)
iso.co.uk/iso-discovery/the-next-generation/donatella-flick-iso-conducting-competition

James Mottram International Piano Competition

Held at the Royal Northern College of Music, this biennial competition is open to pianists aged 18-30, focusing on repertoire by Domenico Scarlatti, Chopin and Debussy, with a first prize of £10,000 plus concert engagements. The competition process also includes a series of masterclasses given by jury members. The competition expects to start taking applications between July and October 2016.

Next competition November 28 - December 3, 2016
rncm.ac.uk/jmipc

The Kathleen Ferrier Memorial Scholarship Fund Competition

Held every April at the Wigmore Hall, this competition is open to young singers of all nationalities who have completed at least one year of study in the UK or Ireland. First prize is £12,500, second is £6000, and there's a Song Prize of £5000 and an Accompanist's Award. The semi-finals and finals take place before a public audience at the Wigmore. Last year's winner was Gemma Lois Summerfield; previous winners include Bryn Terfel (1989). The jury for 2016 will be chaired by Sir Brian McMaster and will include Dame Anne Murray and Eugene Asti.

Next competition March 22 - April 29, 2016 (application deadline February 1)
ferrierawards.org.uk

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BISQC.CA



The Banff Centre

Menuhin Competition London 2016

A different city hosts this biennial violin competition each time. In 2014 it was the turn of Austin, Texas, and was won by 17-year-old Dutch-American violinist Stephen Waarts. For Menuhin's birth centenary year of 2016, the competition will be held at London's Southbank Centre with the Royal Academy of Music as host college, and feature the Philharmonia Orchestra, with all events and concerts open to the public. The jury will be chaired by Pamela Frank and will include previous competition winners Tasmin Little (1985), Julia Fischer (1995) and Ray Chen (2008), all three of whom will also perform during the competition festivities. Topping the various awards is the Senior First Prize, consisting of £10,000 plus the one-year loan of a golden-period Stradivarius violin.

Next competition April 7-17, 2016

Listen Classic FM will broadcast key competition events

menuhincompetition.org
classicfm.com

Northern Ireland International Organ Competition

This annual competition is for organists aged 21 and under, and takes place in Armagh. The winner this year was 19-year-old Alexander Hamilton. The 2016 competition jury, which includes NIIOC Patron David Hill, will award over £2000 of cash prizes along with recital opportunities at major cathedrals throughout the UK and Ireland.

Next competition August 22-24, 2016
(application deadline July 30)

niioc.com

Windsor Festival International String Competition

This biennial competition was launched in 2008 as a tribute to Yehudi Menuhin, its mission to seek out the exceptional string soloists of tomorrow. The Fifth WFISC, held this year, was won by the South Korean violinist JiYoon Lee. Applications open for the next competition from September 2016.



Stephen Waarts, winner of the 2014 Menuhin Competition

Next competition March 12-19, 2017
(application deadline December 1, 2016)

wfinternationalstringcompetition.com

York Early Music International Young Artists Competition

This biennial period-performance competition invites applications from instrumental and vocal ensembles of two or more musicians. This autumn the 2013 winners, the Thalia Ensemble, released a disc of wind quintets by Reicha on Linn Records as part of their prize (see review on page 63). Details on how to apply for the next competition will appear on the website in spring 2016.

Next competition July 13-15, 2017
ncem.co.uk

EUROPE

ARD International Music Competition, Munich

Now in its 65th year, this competition is open to young musicians aged between 17 and 29 who are ready to launch an international career. This year there are categories for double bass, horn, harp and string quartet, with soloist prizes ranging from €5000 to €10,000 and quartet prizes from €12,000 to €24,000. Previous competition winners are a starry bunch, including oboist Heinz Holliger, pianist Mitsuko Uchida, singers Thomas Quasthoff and

Anne Sofie von Otter and the Ebène and Artemis quartets.

Next competition August 29 – September 16, 2016 (application deadline March 31)

Watch/listen The competition will be streamed live on the competition website from the semi-final onwards
ard-musikwettbewerb.de

Basel Composition Competition

This brand-new international composing competition aims to attract today's most exciting composers to Switzerland to have their works premiered by Basel orchestras. Under the directorship of Wolfgang Rihm, the competition is open to composers of all ages and nationalities, and is looking for new, orchestral works yet to be performed. Ten works will be shortlisted by Rihm and jury members Michael Jarrell, Oliver Knussen and Felix Meyer for first performance by the Basel Symphony Orchestra and Basel Chamber Orchestra in public performances. The three winning works will then receive prizes up to a total of CHF100,000.

Next competition February 16-19, 2017
(application deadline May 31, 2016)

baselcompetition.com

Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition

The Bordeaux competition aims to develop and promote young string quartets at an

international level and attract new audiences to the genre. It takes place every three years, working on an alternate cycle with the London and Reggio Emilia competitions. First and second prizes are, respectively, €20,000 and €10,000, along with concert opportunities around France and Europe.

Next competition May 2-8, 2016
(application deadline February 15)

Watch/listen Semi-finals and finals should be streamed live on the competition website

quatuorbordeaux.com

Carl Nielsen International Competition

This biennial competition rotates its disciplines between the violin and flute/clarinets. The tenth Violin Competition takes place in 2016, with a jury presided over by Nikolaj Znaider, who won the Violin Competition in 1992. Soloists will be accompanied in the final by the Odense Symphony Orchestra as they compete for a first prize consisting of €12,000, a recording deal with Orchid Classics and a number of concert engagements with leading orchestras in the Nordic region and Europe.

Next competition April 16-22, 2016

Watch/listen The competition will be streamed live on the web and also broadcast on Danish television/radio in collaboration with the Danish Broadcasting Corporation. Further details will appear on the competition website nearer the time

odensesymfoni.dk

International Chamber Music Competition 'Città di Pinerolo e Torino - Città metropolitana'

Open to young chamber groups, the last competition was in 2013 and was won by the Yoon Trio. There are a number of prizes up for grabs, including a €10,000 first prize, and the Patrizia Cerutti Bresso Special Prize of a Baume & Mercier watch to each member of the group that gives the best interpretation of a work by Schumann or Brahms. The

2016 jury includes clarinetist Dimitri Ashkenazy and pianist Pavel Gililov.

Next competition February 29 – March 6, 2016 (application deadline February 1)

Watch/listen Some of the competition may be broadcast or streamed: check the competition's website nearer the time for details

concosomdcpinerolo.it/

Geneva International Music Competition

Founded in 1939, this competition's impressive list of laureates includes Martha Argerich, Alan Gilbert, Nelson Goerner, Emmanuel Pahud and Sir Georg Solti. Disciplines rotate annually. The composition prize for 2015 hadn't been announced as we went to press but 2014's piano competition was won by South Korean pianist Ji-Yeong Mun. The focus in 2016 will be on voice and string quartet, with the vocal jury presided over by Hedwig Fassbender and the quartet jury presided over by Gábor Takács-Nagy. Among a number of prizes on offer, first prize for each discipline is CHF20,000.

Next competition November 20 – December 2, 2016 (application deadline May 2)

Watch/listen Semi-finals and finals will be video broadcast on the Radio Television Suisse and ARTE Concert websites. There will also be a radio broadcast of the finals on Espace 2

concoursgeneve.ch

The Mahler Competition

This triennial conducting competition was founded in 2004 by the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra with the aim of boosting the careers of conductors aged 35 and under. Previous winners include Gustavo Dudamel (2004) and Lahav Shani (2013). Participants conduct a range of set repertoire pieces including excerpts from the works of Mahler. This year the Mahler work is his Third Symphony. Another notable musical event will be the world premiere of a specially commissioned encore by Georg Friedrich Haas. The



The Israeli conductor Lahav Shani, winner of the 2013 Mahler Competition

jury for 2016, chaired by the orchestra's Chief Conductor Jonathan Nott, includes Jiří Bělohlávek, Barbara Hannigan, Jörg Widmann and Marina Mahler, the composer's granddaughter and Patroness of the Competition.

Next competition May 6-13, 2016

Listen Bavarian Radio records the final concert, conducted by the first-prize winner or joint winners, for deferred broadcast

bambergsymphony.com

International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition

Previous prize-winners of this biennial Leipzig-based period-performance competition include Philip Higham (2008), whose disc of Bach's Cello Suites was released earlier this year (Delphian, 9/15). The

categories rotate, and 2016 is a year for organists, singers and cellists (playing either modern or Baroque instruments). Cash prizes range between €5000 and €10,000. Also on offer are concert engagements with organisations including the Bachfest Leipzig and others, and the opportunity to record a professional CD on the Genuin Classics label.

Next competition July 4-16, 2016 (application deadline March 1)

Watch/listen MDR (the Central German Broadcasting Corporation) records all performances and events for either live or deferred broadcast

bachwettbewerb Leipzig.de

Lyons International Chamber Music Competition

Established in 2004, this chamber music competition

focuses on a different instrumental grouping each year. Last year the competition for string quartets was won by the Castalian Quartet. In 2016 the competition is looking for cello-and-piano duos, and will be judged by a jury including the Oberon Trio's pianist, Jonathan Aner, and cellist Anne Gastinel. They will be awarding cash prizes totalling €24,000, together with a number of professional engagements through organisations such as Palazzetto Bru Zane and France Musique.

Next competition April 19-24, 2016 (application deadline January 15)

Watch/listen Live semi-final and final rounds (April 22 and 24) streamed on nomadmusic.fr.

cimcl.fr

Markneukirchen International Instrumental Competition

This annual competition in the German state of Saxony alternates between string and wind instruments. Last year's competition was won by the Chinese-Austrian violinist Ziyu He and the Austro-German double bassist Dominik Wagner, while previous winners include cellist Peter Bruns. For 2016 the categories are horn and tuba. Prizes include cash awards ranging between €2500 and €5000.

Next competition May 19-28, 2016 (application deadlines: January 10 for horn, January 31 for tuba)

instrumental-competition.de

The Queen Elisabeth Competition

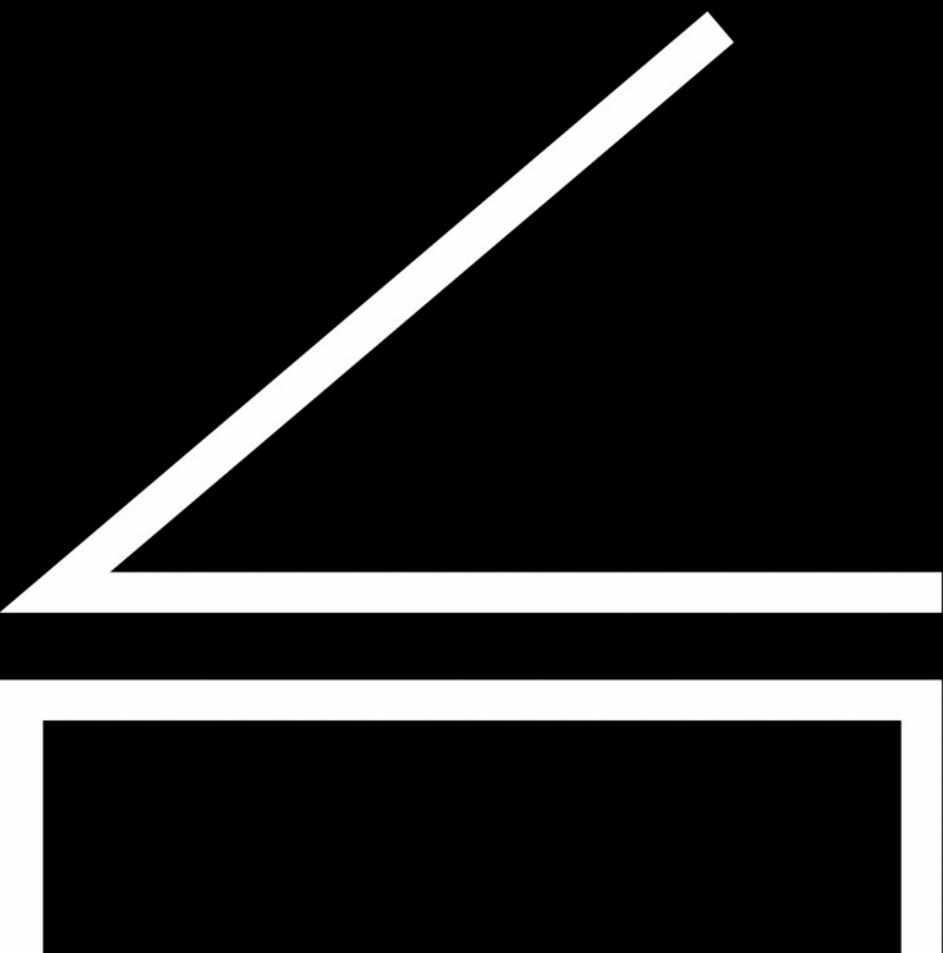
This competition is for pianists, violinists, cellists and singers of all nationalities who have completed their training and are ready to embark upon an international career. Previous winners include Nikolaj Znaider (violin 1997) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (piano 1956). The category rotates annually, and the 2016 competition is for pianists. The final, at Brussels' Palais des Beaux-Arts, involves a concerto performance accompanied by the Belgian



The first three laureates of the 2015 Queen Elisabeth Competition



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Evamaria Wieser artistic consultant
Joel Ethan Fried Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra

Lied Duo

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CONCOURSMONTREAL.CA

National Orchestra conducted by Marin Alsop. First prize is €25,000 but all 12 finalists receive prize money, as do the 12 semi-final candidates who don't make it to the final.

Next competition May 2-28, 2016 (application deadline January 10)

Watch/listen The semi-final will be broadcast live on Belgian national radio and streamed on the competition website. The final will be broadcast live on radio, TV and the internet, and the closing concert will be live on radio and broadcast a few days later on TV. The internet streams will remain on the website

qeimc.be

Robert Schumann Competition for Pianists and Singers

This quadrennial Zwickau-based competition is open to singers and pianists of all nationalities, who perform from a set repertoire list that centres around the works of Robert and Clara Schumann. Previous winners include singers Matthias Goerne and Annette Dasch. The prizes on offer range from €3000 to €10,000, and the gold medal winners also receive performance engagements.

Next competition June 9-19, 2016
schumannzwickau.de

Toulouse International Singing Competition

Held by the city of Toulouse biennially since 1954, young singers perform opera excerpts, oratorio and Lieder with at least one piece by a French composer. The competition finalists are accompanied by the Toulouse Capitole Orchestra for the performance of arias.

Next competition September 5-10, 2016 (application deadline May 15)
chant.toulouse.fr

US/REST OF WORLD

Banff International String Quartet Competition

This triennial competition is open to young string quartets of all nationalities, with 10 ultimately being invited to The Banff Centre in Canada's Banff National Park.



Stanislav Khristenko, 2013 winner of the Cleveland International Piano Competition

More than \$150,000 in cash and prizes is on offer, with laureate quartets also offered residency opportunities at The Banff Centre. All participating quartets receive career development awards but the ensemble that wins first prize benefits from a custom-designed three-year artistic and career development programme, including concert engagements in major concert venues around the world. The 2013 competition was won by the US's Dover Quartet.

Next competition August 29 - September 4, 2016 (application deadline 1 March)

Watch/listen Updates will be posted on the competition website
bisqc.ca

Cleveland International Piano Competition

Established in 1975 and taking place triennially, the CIPC's previous medal winners include Jean-Yves Thibaudet and Sergei Babayan. This year the final round has been expanded to two phases, with the four finalists now performing chamber repertoire with the Escher Quartet prior to concerto performances with The Cleveland Orchestra conducted by Bramwell Tovey. The Mixon First Prize has also risen from \$50,000 to \$75,000. Meanwhile, the

surrounding festival includes a performance from the 2013 winner, Stanislav Khristenko, concert talks and panel discussions, and an evening concert series.

Next competition

July 24 - August 7, 2016

Watch/listen The final-round performances with The Cleveland Orchestra are being webcast for the first time this year. Watch live on the CIPC website or on Cleveland's PBS affiliate WVIZ, or deferred slightly on medici.tv

clevelandpiano.org

Isangyun Competition

Founded in 2003 in memory of the South Korean composer Isang Yun (1917-95), this competition, based in Tongyeong City, alternates between the disciplines of piano, violin and cello. In 2016 it will be the piano, the entrants competing for cash prizes including a KRW30,000,000 first prize. The winner of the last piano competition, in 2013, was Hong-gi Kim.

Next competition October 31 - November 8, 2016 (application deadline has passed)

isangyuncompetition.org

Montreal International Music Competition

Held annually since 2002, this is a competition for pianists, singers and violinists, with the discipline rotating annually. The

fifth competition dedicated to the violin takes place in 2016, the previous one - in 2013 - being won by the Belgian violinist Marc Bouchkov. Entrants will be competing for cash prizes ranging from \$10,000 to \$30,000, plus concert engagements.

Next competition May 22 - June 2, 2016 (application deadline January 15)
concoursmontreal.ca/en

Unisa Music Competition

This Pretoria-based international music competition alternately covers the piano, organ, voice, clarinet and flute. Previous winners include the pianist Marc-André Hamelin. Last year's flute and clarinet competition was won by the South Korean clarinetist Sang Yoon Kim and the Russian flautist Matvey Demin. The 2016 competition is for pianists, with a Jazz Piano category running alongside the Classical Piano one. Prize money will come from a pot of over ZAR820,000.

Next competition January 26 - February 6, 2016
unisa.ac.za

Van Cliburn International Piano Competition

This quadrennial competition takes place in Fort Worth, Texas. In 2013 Vadym Kholodenko took first prize, with silver going to Beatrice Rana. The 2017 jury will be chaired by Leonard Slatkin and include pianists Jean-Philippe Collard and Anne-Marie McDermott. Cash prizes will be awarded from a pot of over \$170,000, along with career management and concert engagements. The finalists will perform with the Brentano Quartet, and then with the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra conducted by Slatkin. For the preliminary round, all competitors will perform a commissioned work by another of the jurors, Marc-André Hamelin.

Next competition May 26 - June 10, 2017 (application deadline October 13 2016)
cliburn.org

GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

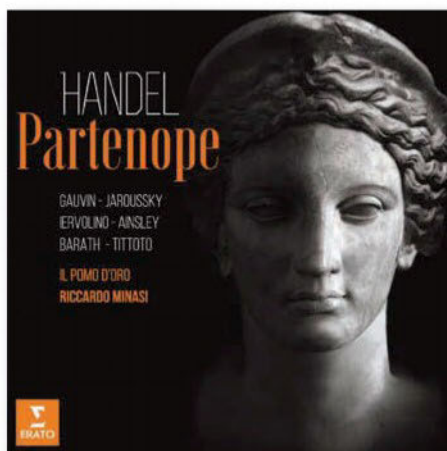
Alexandra Coghlan welcomes only the fourth recording of Handel's 'school for lovers', and the one that now becomes the top CD recommendation



Handel

Partenope

Karina Gauvin *sop.*.....Partenope
 Philippe Jaroussky *countertenor*.....Arsace
 Teresa Iervolino *mez.*.....Rosmira
 Emőke Baráth *sop.*.....Armindo
 John Mark Ainsley *ten*.....Emilio
 Luca Tittoto *bass*.....Ormonto
 Il Pomo d'Oro / Riccardo Minasi *vn*
 Erato © 2564 60900-7 (3h 23' • DDD • S/T/t)



Minasi's triumphant new recording is so sensitive to the shifting tone as to bring this unusual work's virtues into sharp new focus

'[Senesino] put me in a sweat in telling me that Partenope was likely to be brought on the stage, for it is the very worst book (excepting one) that I ever read in my whole life...' (Owen Swiney)

All the reasons why *Partenope* was originally rejected by London's Royal Academy of Music in 1726 – frivolity of tone, lack of extended arias and too much recitative – are those which make it so natural a fit for a contemporary audience. EJ Dent describes the libretto as 'Shakespearean', putting his finger on the unusual balance of dramatic modes Stampiglia and Handel achieve in a story that ends in a double wedding but could just as easily end in tragedy. Shorter arias distil all Handel's mature melodic instincts into more emotionally concentrated expressions, while longer recitatives allow for quicker, wittier interplay and more detailed character development.

Which makes it all the more baffling that this is only the third commercial recording of the opera, joining Sigiswald Kuijken (1979) and Christian Curnyn (2004), as well as the DVD production directed by Francisco Negrin (2008). While all three have their interest, and Curnyn's treatment has been a valuable benchmark since its release, Riccardo Minasi's triumphant new recording is so

sensitive to the work's shifting tone – by turns buoyant and light-footed, tender, humorous (just listen to the mock-martial relish of the horns in Rosmira's Act 1 closer 'Io seguo sol fiero') – and so impeccably cast as to bring this unusual work's virtues into sharp new focus.

At the centre of Handel's love-tangle is Queen Partenope, who must choose

between her many suitors: Emilio, the pugnacious Prince of neighbouring Cuma, smooth-talking Arsace, who has abandoned his beloved Rosmira to pursue the queen, and the shyly sincere Armindo.

An onstage battle adds political scope and instrumental colour to an essentially domestic narrative, generating a thrilling sequence of orchestral and vocal episodes. The introductory Marche captures the difference between Curnyn and Minasi. Precise, measured and texturally clean, Curnyn's battle would do any British general proud, but Minasi's is the florid, boisterous conflict of opera, bright with jangling percussion additions and the sword-clatter commentary of Federica Bianchi and Davide Pozzi's harpsichords. You can smell the blood and the braggadocio.

Is there a better Handelian soprano than Karina Gauvin currently working? Her *Partenope* does nothing to dull the sheen on the Canadian's crown. The queen must remain a cipher to the end, never showing her hand. Gauvin twitches her lovers' strings just tightly enough to set them dancing. We hear the relish in her extraordinary 'Spera o godi', in which she simultaneously praises

Armindo and punishes Arsace (Minasi's orchestra her willing co-conspirator), and the casual brilliance of her top C in her opening aria 'L'amor ed il destin' is deployed with calculated ease. Yet there's a shy warmth to her 'Si, scherza, si' that says that the seductress has finally become a woman worthy of the faithful Armindo.

In contrast to Lawrence Zazzo's vocal muscularity (Chandos) and René Jacobs's forceful delivery (Sony), Philippe Jaroussky's Arsace is all softness



(l-r) Karina Gauvin, Philippe Jaroussky and Teresa Iervolino



Philippe Jaroussky at the recording sessions for Warner's new *Partenope*: the French countertenor is 'more a lover than a fighter' as Arsace, one of *Partenope*'s many suitors

– more a lover than a fighter, and the more persuasive for it. He croons his promises to the forsaken Rosmira with such sincerity ('Ch'io parta?') that neither she nor we can refuse him. Jaroussky's bright, light instrument captures both the character's peevish vanity ('Sento amor') and his fragile charm ('Ma quai note').

Casting a soprano as Armindo rather than a countertenor (as both Curnyn and Kuijken do) gives the role an innocence that articulates a poignant contrast with the deceitful Arsace. Emőke Baráth makes an exquisite, persuasive suitor. The Hungarian singer grows from tentative delicacy in Act 1 to ringing joy in Act 3 – a constant of sincerity in this group of dissemblers. Mezzo Teresa Iervolino makes much of Rosmira's low-lying music, retaining vocal colour even in the depths of 'Furie son dell'alma mia', and together with bass Luca Tittoto (wonderfully characterful and agile in the supporting

role of Ormonte, chief of guards) brings an anchoring depth to a work dominated by so many upper voices.

Minasi follows previous recordings in using Handel's original 1730 score as the basis for his performing edition, but also steals judiciously from later revivals – notably an extra aria for Armindo ('Come se ti vedro') and an attractive trumpet sinfonia. The result, burnished with the conductor's swift speeds and careful pacing, is a recording that needs no visuals to bring its story to life, an opera lively with human insight and understanding – to comedy what *Giulio Cesare* is to tragedy.

Minasi has made a masterpiece, catching the passing glances and sideways smiles of Handel's score, and transforming them into something of real dramatic substance. Minasi's back-catalogue is exceptional but this is his finest work yet. **G**

Comparative versions:

Kuijken (12/79⁸, 2/91⁸) (SONY) 88697 52997-2

Curnyn (9/05) (CHAN) CHAN0719

Mortensen (5/10) (DECC) **DVD** 074 3348DX2;

LP 074 3347DH

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LP LP	aas all available separately
	oas only available separately



Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Geoffrey Norris welcomes Scriabin from Vasily Petrenko in Oslo:

'He is alert to the shifting moods, paces and dynamics, finding expressive potential in those evanescent, volatile gestures' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 52**



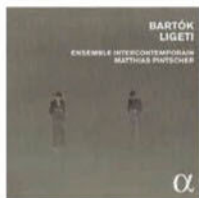
Edward Seckerson on a Sibelius set from Okko Kamu in Lahti:

'Kamu is inquisitive and, familiar though the music undoubtedly is to him, always gives us a sense of exploration' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 55**

Bartók · Ligeti



Bartók Contrasts, Sz111^a. Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, Sz110^b **Ligeti** Violin Concerto^c. Cello Concerto^d. Piano Concerto^e
^aJérôme Comte ^{cl} Jeanne-Marie Conquer,
^aDiego Tosi ^{vns} Pierre Strauch ^{vc} Hidéki Nagano,
^{ab}Sébastien Vichard, ^bDimitri Vassilakis ^{pfs}
^bGilles Durot, ^bSamuel Favre ^{perc} ^{cde}Ensemble
Intercontemporain / Matthias Pintscher
Alpha Ⓜ ② ALPHA217 (109' • DDD)



György Ligeti's Piano Concerto (1985-88) has been threatening to transform itself into a modern composition lollipop and I, for one, have been reluctant to be taken along for the ride. Following the relentless pace of invention that marked Ligeti's 1960s and '70s advance – *Atmosphères* to *San Francisco Polyphony* without too many people noticing the join – the jaunty rhythmic jig and slide-whistle sound effects of the Piano Concerto can be made to sound like Gershwin busking at the circus. But now pianist Hidéki Nagano and the Ensemble Intercontemporain under Matthias Pintscher issue a reminder that Ligeti's harmonic and rhythmic procedures had certainly evolved; dredge beneath the surface, though, and his gestural language was still dealing with the sonic theatre-of-the-absurd he had staged during his mid-1960s *Aventures* and *Nouvelles aventures*.

If anyone still harbours doubts over the viability of the CD, no doubt Alpha Classics will be wanting a word. Everything from the quality of paper (the booklet is printed on a gorgeous waxy paper like ancient parchment to the touch) to the trimly minimalist packaging and the thoughtfully assembled programme has obviously been carefully weighed up. Boulez's 1994 DG release of Ligeti's three solo instrumental concertos (also with the Ensemble Intercontemporain) set the terms of the debate, but never have such resolute performances of these pieces been captured with such lucent detail – and if that weren't enough, Alpha also gives you top-notch

versions of Bartók's *Contrasts* and Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion to help frame the historical context.

Here, Ligeti's two late-period concertos (piano and violin) bookend his 1966 Cello Concerto. This concerto begins in silence, but not the voyeuristic silence typical of John Cage. The engineers suddenly open the aperture and you're dropped ears first into a masterfully balanced, orchestrated silence out of which a single high cello note imperceptibly slips. This performance reminds you that Ligeti coordinates the silence as diligently as he does the notes. And when the narrative crumbles into chattering plops, squeaks and rustlings, we are walked right inside this carefully honed noise. Cellist Pierre Strauch feels in overall control in a way that Nicolas Altstaedt in his recent recording for Neos did not.

As already trailed, Nagano's take on the Piano Concerto is an instant classic. The physicality of his playing is matched by the orchestral Punch and Judy; listen out near the beginning of the first movement for the way grumbling subterranean murmurs emanating from the general direction of the contrabassoon stoke the ensemble fire, and for the insistent mechanised click-clack of woodblocks. Personally I've always found Ligeti's Violin Concerto the most illusive of his late-period works. But Pintscher keeps the unfolding structural narrative rigid (as opposed to Christina Åstrand and Thomas Dausgaard's weirdly perfumed, romanticised 2000 recording) – which, just as in the Piano Concerto, allows Ligeti's fantasy to roam free and wild. Review filed, I'm off to have another listen, this time for pure pleasure. **Philip Clark**

Ligeti Concertos – selected comparison:

Ens Intercontemporain, Boulez. (1/95) (DG) 439 808-2GH

Violin Concerto – selected comparison:

Åstrand, Danish Nat RSO, Dausgaard

(10/00) (CHAN) CHAN9830

Cello Concerto – selected comparison:

Altstaedt, Plural Ens, Panisello (3/15) (NEOS) NEOS11013

Beamish

'The Singing'
Accordion Concerto, 'The Singing'^a.

A Cage of Doves^a. Under the Wing of the Rock^b. Reckless^a. Trumpet Concerto^c

^bBranford Marsalis ^{asax} Håkan Hardenberger ^{tpt}

^aJames Crabb ^{acco} ^cNational Youth Orchestra of Scotland; ^{ab}Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins

BIS Ⓢ BIS1256 (74' • DDD/DSD)



BIS's extensive coverage of Sally Beamish continues with a disc of orchestral

music largely written during 2003-07. The programme is framed by two concertos, of which *The Singing* was inspired by traditional Celtic music and Gaelic singing that survived the effects of the Highland Clearances through to the present. After the steady growth then dispersal of energy in the first movement is a sequence of variations on a bagpipe lament, whose cumulative intensity spills into a finale that casts the main thematic ideas in a more affirmative light. James Crabb is audibly equal to the demands of the accordion part, as is Håkan Hardenberger in the Trumpet Concerto. Here the reflection on aspects of city life in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* gives rise to a three-movement format – the 'coming to life' of the Prelude being followed by an alternately suave and insinuating 'dance parade', before the finale evokes urban rough and tumble via an array of percussion then a heady cadenza which presages the closing uproar.

Composed for viola and arranged for alto saxophone, *Under the Wing of the Rock* tells of compassion in the aftermath of the Glencoe Massacre – its underlying plangency to the fore in Branford Marsalis's playing – while *A Cage of Doves* took its cue from George Mackay Brown's novel *Magnus* and highlights Beamish's orchestration at its most imaginative. Very different is *Reckless* (2012), an effervescent curtain-raiser written for the young professionals of the Southbank Sinfonia. Stylish and committed playing from the Scottish orchestras under Martyn Brabbins,



Ensemble Intercontemporain and Matthias Pintscher offer Ligeti's three solo concertos, with chamber Bartók as a bonus

with vividly immediate sound and pertinent notes by the composer. Those yet to become acquainted with Beamish's orchestral music should certainly start here.

Richard Whitehouse

Beethoven

Piano Concerto No 3, Op 37^a. Mass, Op 86^b

^aEmanuel Ax ^{pf} ^bJoëlle Harvey ^{sop} ^bKelley O'Connor ^{mez} ^bWilliam Burden ^{ten} ^bShenyang

^{bass-bar} San Francisco Symphony ^bChorus and Orchestra / Michael Tilson Thomas

Recorded live at Davies Symphony Hall,

San Francisco, ^aSeptember 26-28, 2013,

^bJanuary 15-18, 2014



Contingency of keys apart, it is difficult to see why a record label would think of putting these two very different Beethoven works on the same disc. It is not as if they were programmed together in the same San Francisco concert.

Of the two, it is the performance of the concerto that gives the greater satisfaction, which is a pity since the Mass is the rarer bird and even more elusive to the touch. Beethoven's first tentative essay in the

medium, the Mass was written in 1807 alongside the Fourth Piano Concerto. The *Pastoral* Symphony was also in gestation at the time, which is not without significance given that the Mass is more social than sacred. 'An act of worship Rousseauistically simple as well as Masonically enlightened,' as Wilfrid Mellers characteristically put it.

The Mass's antecedents lie in the Masses and choral works of Beethoven's teacher Haydn, something that shines through in recordings under Richard Hickox and Colin Davis but which is rather less apparent in this new San Francisco account. Robustly delivered, the San Francisco performance is more an all-purpose choral occasion than an attempt to meet the work on its own particular ground, which is what Davis does with such imagination and style in his 2006 LSO Live version. The great fugal perorations are crisper under Davis – more Haydnesque, you might say – and his sense of such things as the pastoral promptings at the *Agnus Dei*'s end is altogether keener. He also benefits from having a better orchestra than Hickox and better soloists than Michael Tilson Thomas.

Ironically the performance of the C minor Piano Concerto, deftly and stylishly underwritten by Tilson Thomas and his San Francisco players, has many of the qualities

of refinement and imagination which that of the Mass lacks. Ax's accounts of the slow movement and finale (a proper *allegro* not overdriven) are particularly insightful and affecting. It's also encouraging to meet a soloist and conductor who recognise that Beethoven's solution to bringing the tonally remote slow movement back into the fold with a punning 'yes-no-yes' jest on G sharp/A flat can only be achieved if the slow movement and finale are played as a segue. **Richard Osborne**

Mass – selected comparisons:

Collegium Musicum 90, Hickox (1/04) (CHAN) CHAN0703

LSO, C Davis (11/08) (LSO) LSO0594

Beethoven

Symphonies – No 5, Op 67; No 7, Op 92

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra / Manfred Honeck

Reference Recordings ©  FR718

(71 • DDD/DSD)

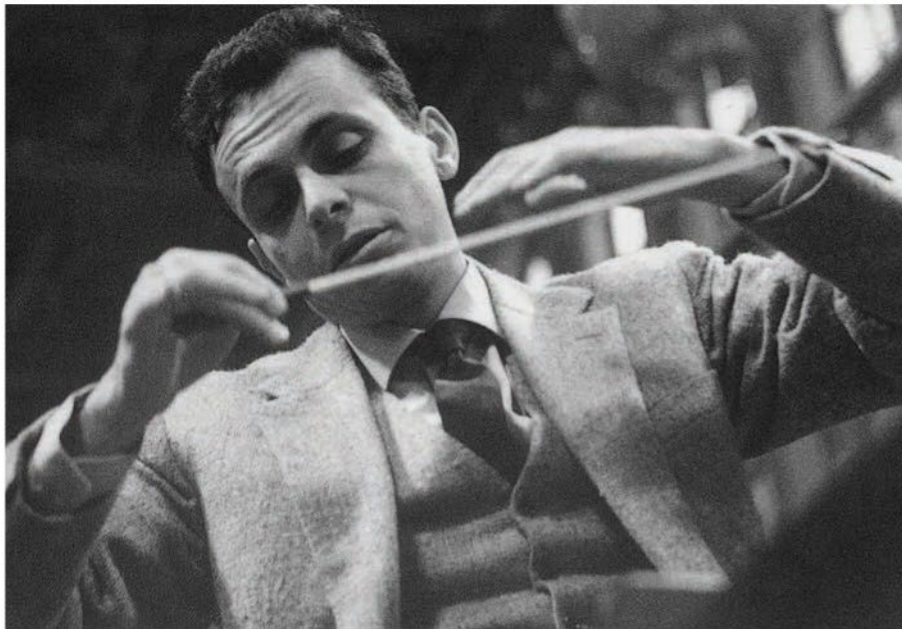


Manfred Honeck has been looked on with favour in these columns since the late 1980s, when he directed a fine recording of Max Bruch's Third Symphony (Marco

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

SIBELIUS AT 150

Andrew Achenbach listens to a bumper crop of reissues for the composer's sesquicentennial, focusing on a range of symphony cycles



Lorin Maazel: his 1960s Sibelius cycle with the VPO appears in an audiophile reissue from Decca

Few pioneering recordings from any era burn with greater passionate intensity or recreative spark than those set down in London during the early 1930s by the Finnish maestro Robert Kajanus (1856-1933). They were originally issued on Columbia 78s and the first two volumes of HMV's Sibelius Society series, and the repertoire embraced Symphonies Nos 1-3 and 5, *Tapiola*, *Pohjola's Daughter*, *Belshazzar's Feast*, and the 'Intermezzo' and 'Alla marcia' from the *Karelia Suite*. The septuagenarian's identification with his countryman's music is total, and his dedicated interpretations distil an elemental power, entrancing poetic reach and lofty sweep that continue to astonish. Kajanus's towering legacy is one of the many reasons to invest in Warner Classics' seven-CD **Historical Recordings and Rarities**, Beecham's 1935-39 LPO recordings being another – try the wild ride that is *Lemminkäinen's Return* to hear this legendary partnership operating at full throttle. Koussevitzky's volcanic live BBC SO Seventh (Queen's Hall, May 1933) is here too, as are Boult's conspicuously vital readings of *Night Ride and Sunrise*, *The Oceanides* and *Romance* with the same band. Rarities elsewhere include soprano Helmi Liukkonen's plucky concert performance of *Luonnotar*

(from June 4, 1934, at Queen's Hall) with the Helsinki PO under Georg Schnéevoigt; five songs from contralto Marian Anderson partnered by Kosti Vehanen (Paris, 1936); and Sibelius himself conducting the *Andante festivo* (Berlin, 1939). Transfers have been consistently well made, and Robert Layton provides an absorbing booklet essay.

Sony has taken the opportunity to round up **Eugene Ormandy's** underrated stereo Sibelius recordings from 1957 to 1980. You'll find two versions each of Symphonies Nos 1, 2 and 7, the Violin Concerto (with Isaac Stern and Dylana Jenson, from 1969 and 1980 respectively – but no room, strangely, for his distinguished 1959 account with David Oistrakh), *Karelia Suite*, *En saga* and no fewer than three of *Finlandia*. On the whole, Ormandy (always a doughty champion of the composer) proves a cogent, unexaggerated guide, and the Philadelphians respond with their customary lustre, dash and discipline. I was especially riveted by his terrific 1962 account of the First Symphony (some departures from the text notwithstanding) and a decidedly classy 1957-60 pairing of Nos 2 and 7. There's also a most exciting *En saga* from 1961, albeit too closely recorded.

By comparison, Symphonies Nos 4 and 5, *Tapiola*, *The Oceanides* and *Pohjola's Daughter* (from 1975-78) generate a somewhat lower voltage.







Both Leonard Bernstein and **Lorin Maazel** recorded all seven numbered symphonies during the 1960s. Decca Classics' lavish 24-bit restoration of the latter's famous VPO cycle (credited to Ian Jones working at Abbey Road Studios) will bring a smile to audiophiles. It's spread here over four CDs (and also snugly housed on a single Blu-ray Disc), and Gordon Parry's engineering possesses almost startling physical impact and tangible presence. Interpretatively speaking, however, I persist in finding this a maddeningly uneven package. Granted, Nos 1, 4, 7 and *Tapiola* remain among the most boldly compelling ever recorded, but I've personally never cared for Maazel's relentlessly macho Second (it's no match for the thrilling LSO/Monteux or RPO/Barbirolli from a few years earlier), nor his hasty, at times brusque Third, dutiful Fifth and choppy, flustered Sixth.

Sony's NYPO/**Leonard Bernstein** anthology (newly refurbished by Andreas Meyer and sounding markedly more explicit than I remember) likewise has its fair share of ups and downs. Of the symphonies the Fifth stands out, a reading of pungent individuality yet enviable inexorability, with the Seventh very nearly its equal (one is reminded that the young Bernstein studied at Tanglewood under Koussevitzky). I appreciate the sinewy logic, malleability and infectious fervour he brings to Nos 1 and 2, whereas the intrepidly distinctive readings of Nos 3, 4 and 6 occasionally suffer from a lack of composure. As for the best of the extras, Zino Francescatti is on exhilarating form in the Violin Concerto, and we also get a truly exceptional *Pohjola's Daughter* (at the time the strongest since Toscanini's).

It's been fascinating to compare Lenny's sumptuous live Vienna tapings for DG of the first two symphonies with those altogether more dynamic and purposeful NYPO accounts. Be in no doubt, here is music-making of giant personality, combustible charge and brazen temperament. Indeed, there are things in both performances that will have you gasping in wonder, if admittedly not always for the right reasons: the slow movement of the Second, for instance, is bent out of shape and clocks in at an inflated 18 minutes. The First is far less baffling – big-hearted, impulsive and often ravishingly beautiful to leave you in no doubt as to the conductor's

beaming affection for this score. For the remainder of the composite symphony cycle in DG's handsome 14-CD **Sibelius Edition** the programmers have plumped for Karajan's commanding mid-'60s versions of the last four (the Fifth a bona fide classic), while the Third is represented by Okko Kamu's bracing Helsinki RSO account – still a front-runner, this, marvellously well paced and notable for an outstandingly perceptive slow movement. Kamu's home-grown, invigoratingly fresh *En saga* from the same 1973 LP also makes an appearance, along with his thoroughly idiomatic *Lemminkäinen Legends*, *Karelia Suite* and *The Bard*. The bulk of the tone-poems are safely entrusted to Neeme Järvi and the Gothenburg SO (*The Oceanides*, *Pohjola's Daughter* and *Tapiola* effortlessly activate the goose-bumps), who also team up with soprano Soile Isokoski for an impressive *Luonnotar*. Both Kim Borg and Tom Krause display stellar vocal artistry in a 61-minute sequence of 24 songs that make up disc 10. Good, too, to have Horst Stein's sensitive Suisse Romande *Pelléas et Mélisande* (superbly engineered by Decca in Geneva's Victoria Hall), as well as the Emerson Quartet's stimulating traversal of *Voces intimae*. It's a pity the set rather fizzles out. The final two discs feature Jussi Jalas (the composer's son-in-law) at the helm of the Hungarian National PO. Although the repertoire is rewarding (both sets of *Scènes historiques*, *The Tempest*, *Scaramouche* and *Swanwhite*) and Jalas's actual conducting by no means without zest or characterful profile, the rough-and-ready orchestral playing and studio-bound, dated sound do leave a lot to be desired. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

	Sibelius Historical Recs & Rarities G Various artists Warner © 7 2564 60531-7
	Sibelius Orchestral Works Philadelphia Orch / Eugene Ormandy RCA © 8 88875 10858-2
	Sibelius Symphonies VPO / Lorin Maazel Decca (4 CDs + ) 478 8541
	Sibelius Symphonies Remastered Edn New York PO / Leonard Bernstein Sony Classical © 7 88875 02614-2
	Sibelius Edition Various artists DG © 14 479 5109

Polo, 10/88; now on Naxos). Nowadays it is recordings with his own Pittsburgh SO that garner golden opinions.

These have been of late-Romantic music, though Pittsburgh also has a fine Beethoven tradition. William Steinberg's celebrated recording of the *Pastoral* Symphony (Capitol, 5/53^R) was described by the old *Record Guide* as 'a performance of great vitality, remarkable for its fidelity to what we know of the 19th-century orchestral style'. They are words which could pretty well sum up these latest recordings of the Fifth and Seventh symphonies, not least because they are under a conductor who is himself deeply versed in that long-established Austro-German tradition of Beethoven interpretation whose wilderness years might finally be coming to an end.

Honeck's approach to Beethoven's music is no less forensic but far more robust than that of the new-age authenticists – more Promethean, you might say. In the Seventh Symphony, he tells us, it is essential to have 'everything played with the biggest possible impetus and pent-up power'. It's what he calls 'taking the music to the edge', which is very much what he does as this astonishing live performance reaches its apotheosis in the final movement.

Honeck takes a similar view of the Fifth Symphony, whose opening, he says, requires 'grandiose weight, power and vehemence'. Karajan in his last years did this on the orchestra; Honeck does it by playing the four-note motto with rhythmic rigour but at a slower tempo than the rest of the movement. But, then, who is to say what Beethoven would have thought? 'Fate knocking at the door' and all that. Honeck has quite a few other old-fashioned tricks up his sleeve, though none that is quite as obvious as this.

The Pittsburgh playing marries epic power with a revealing translucency of texture, something which the aptly named Soundmirror team catches in sound that provides generous levels of reverberation with crystal-clear detailing. Honeck has a wonderful ear for detail, be it quietly thematic or utterly bizarre, as in the piccolo's crackerjack contributions to the finale of the Fifth, whose final chord nonetheless manages to offer an inch-perfect balance between piccolo and drum. (The timpani detailing is a revelation throughout.)

Like Carlos Kleiber before him, Honeck divides the fiddles antiphonally, a *sine qua non* in the Seventh but a great joy in the Fifth, where this former member of the Vienna Philharmonic's second violin section conjures forth all manner of telling

effects, none more beautiful than the exquisitely spun second violin counterpoint seven bars before fig C (3'49") in the slow movement. Not even Carlos Kleiber manages that. Kleiber's readings are more classical than Honeck's: less histrionic, more dramatic. But that's a purist's view. Honeck's performances deserve to be heard. **Richard Osborne**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

VPO, C Kleiber (6/75^R, 9/76^R) (DG) 447 400-2G0R

Bruckner

Symphony No 0, 'Die Nullte'

Philharmonie Festiva / Gerd Schaller

Profil © PH15035 (43' • DDD). Recorded live at the Regentenbau, Bad Kissingen, March 8, 2015



Often overlooked by conductors in the past, Bruckner's D minor Symphony (*Die Nullte*)

has seen something of a renaissance in the last few years, finding its way into many ongoing and recently completed recorded cycles. Although Bruckner nullified the symphony in the early 1870s, this is no apprentice work but the often profound conception of a composer who, upon commencing work on the score in 1869, had already completed the F minor *Study Symphony*, the three great Masses and the First Symphony.

Schaller's previous Bruckner recordings, many involving special editions of the symphonies by William Carragan, are usually insightful and, in the First and Second symphonies in particular, frequently inspired. This new recording of the D minor Symphony, however, while well played and recorded, seems to me slightly wanting in youthful energy. Matters are not helped by the rather deliberate pacing of the symphony's introduction, marked *Allegro*. Schaller's tempo of crotchet=98 is certainly swifter than Maazel's crotchet=90 but significantly slower than the 110-120 adopted by most other conductors. While the opening sounds splendidly ominous in Schaller's hands, much of the development comes across as ponderous. There are no problems with the interpretation of the *Andante* or the wonderful slow introduction to the finale, both of which have real eloquence. Schaller's tempi for the *Scherzo* and the main body of the finale are also near ideal, although once again an extra dose of adrenaline in the performance would not have gone amiss.

Those collecting Schaller's cycle need not hesitate. Given the choice, though, I'd

opt for Haitink's classic 1966 account or Inbal's much underrated 1990 recording (Teldec, 3/91 – nla). **Christian Hoskins**

Selected comparisons:

Bavarian RSO, Maazel (2/11) (BRKL) 900711

RCO, Haitink (3/14) (PHIL) 478 6360DB36

Coleridge-Taylor · Delius · H Wood

Coleridge-Taylor Violin Concerto, Op 80

Delius Suite **H Wood** Violin Concerto

Tasmin Little *vn*

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / **Sir Andrew Davis**

Chandos © CHAN10879 (78' • DDD)



Tasmin Little's magnificent new recording of the irresistibly tuneful and big-hearted Violin Concerto that Samuel Coleridge-Taylor wrote in 1912 for Maud Powell (and which, sadly, he was never to hear) jumps to the head of a select but hotly competitive field. What lustrous tone, fragrant poetry and generosity of spirit Little brings to the soaringly lyrical solo part, and how fortunate she is in having such fervent, watchful support from the BBC Philharmonic at the very top of their game under Andrew Davis. Theirs is a performance of genuine stature and one which certainly made me fall in love all over again with this rewarding creation.

You'll encounter a comparable charisma and dedication in these artists' exemplary account of Haydn Wood's A minor Concerto. Composed in 1928, it had to wait a further five years for its first airing, in a radio broadcast featuring the Catalan virtuoso Antonio Brosa (who went on to give the March 1940 New York world premiere of Britten's Violin Concerto). It's a red-blooded, ripely Romantic and impeccably crafted vehicle, rather less distinctive in profile than the Coleridge-Taylor but whose many opportunities for bravura display are eagerly devoured here, and which can boast a central *Andante sostenuto* of spine-tingling beauty.

Little and Davis also make a gorgeous thing of Delius's four-movement Suite. Written in Paris between 1888 and 1891 (but not heard until a BBC broadcast in 1984), it gets a performance of scrupulous sensitivity, wistful tenderness and affectionate ardour to set alongside Ralph Holmes's with Vernon Handley and the RPO for Unicorn-Kanchana from three decades ago (now on Heritage, 9/85, 1/13). Excellent booklet-notes by Anthony Burton; sumptuous sound and a wholly truthful balance, too.

To sum up, a disc with a distinct touch of magic about it, movingly dedicated by Little to the memory of Chandos founder Brian Couzens, who died just a few days before the sessions. **Andrew Achenbach**

Dutilleux · Debussy

Debussy Cello Sonata^a

Dutilleux *Tout un monde lointain*...^b

Trois Strophes sur le nom de Sacher^a

Emmanuelle Bertrand *vc*^a **Pascal Amoyel** *pf*

^b**Lucerne Symphony Orchestra** / **James Gaffigan**

Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2209 (48' • DDD)



Henri Dutilleux's Cello Concerto *Tout un monde lointain*... (1970) is so intimately

wrapped up in his relationship with Mstislav Rostropovich, the work's dedicatee, that other cellists might struggle to find space to call their own. An example: Dutilleux grafted much of his cello-writing around the upper reaches of the A string, where Rostropovich could, in theory, have soared happily all day. Jean-Guihen Queyras's 2001 recording with the Bordeaux-Aquitaine National Orchestra under Hans Graf tries to match Rostropovich's expressive nobility but crumbles under the pressure. Recorded 10 years later, Anssi Karttunen (with Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France) discreetly nudges Dutilleux's piece away from Rostropovich, the motionless fourth movement in particular suggestive of post-spectralist harmonic distance.

Emmanuelle Bertrand's new recording chisels something personal from her awareness of these varied thoughts about a Dutilleux performance tradition. Dutilleux was Bertrand's mentor, yet her fierce independence shines through. In her hands that same fourth movement, 'Miroirs', has a warmer glow than Karttunen (and certainly than the maddeningly monochrome Truls Mørk), and she resists absolutely Queyras's synthetic sweetness.

Dutilleux's concerto was his response to the fleeting poetic images of Charles Baudelaire, and Bertrand's playing remains infused with the idea of his 'tout un monde lointain' – a 'whole distant world'. Mørk feels too often as if he is merely orbiting Myung-Whun Chung's French Radio Orchestra; but Bertrand achieves a giddy sense of balanced perspective against those delicately spiced flavours served up by James Gaffigan's Luzerner Sinfonieorchester. The highly *misterioso* percussive shuffling that

opens the piece blends seamlessly into the cello's low-key entry – the urgency of not much happening; the expressive potential of the unsaid.

And as the movement slips towards a slammed orchestral *tutti* oddly (consciously?) reminiscent of Messiaen, you realise how far this music has journeyed in such a short space of time. Bertrand's decision to programme the Dutilleux alongside her rhythmically lithe and subtly shaded performance of Debussy's Cello Sonata (1915) is wise; the third movement of the concerto is a salty, fluid seascape clearly indebted to the French master. The disc opens with Dutilleux's *Trois Strophes sur le nom de Sacher* (1976) – hardly the most exciting piece ever written, but Bertrand resists the arid dryness I've heard elsewhere. **Philip Clark**

Tout un monde lointain... – selected comparisons:

Queyras, Bordeaux-Aquitaine Nat Orch, Graf

(5/03) (SONY) 88697 48685-2

Mørk, French Rad Orch, Chung

(8/02) (VIRG) 545502-2; (WACL) 615810-2

Karttunen, Rad France PO, Salonen

(5/13) (DG) 479 1180GH

Enescu

Symphony No 4. Chamber Symphony, Op 33.

Nuages d'automne sur les forêts

NDR Radio Philharmonic Orchestra / **Peter Ruzicka**

CPO © CPO777 966-2 (62' • DDD)



Peter Ruzicka follows his pioneering disc of Enescu's Fifth Symphony and *Isis*

(10/14) with the earlier of the Romanian's unfinished symphonies, realised by composer and musicologist Pascal Bentoiu. Likewise fully drafted, albeit with only its first movement and a third of its successor orchestrated, the Fourth Symphony (1934) yet inhabits a vastly different emotional domain – its initial *Allegro* evincing a visceral anguish for the most part amply conveyed by this powerful if slightly too broad reading. With its martial undertones and haunted progress, the central *Andante* is one of Enescu's most distinctive creations; after which the energetic final *Allegro* brings an emotional release that avoids any hint of triumphalism – not least in the stark defiance of its climactic bars. Ruzicka and his Hanover players assuredly have its measure, confirming the work's place among the most vital symphonies of its era (Vaughan Williams's Fourth makes for a telling comparison), though future recordings will hopefully uncover even



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more of the intricately heterophonic writing which is a hallmark of this music.

As to the couplings, the eight-minute fragment of *Nuages d'automne sur les forêts* is all that Enescu wrote (in the early 1930s) for seemingly the first part in a trilogy of which only *Vox maris* saw completion. There have been earlier recordings, but Ruzicka's astute handling of its sombre expression and swirling textures is demonstrably superior. Nor is his account of the valedictory Chamber Symphony (1954) to be found wanting, even though Hannu Lintu's recording captures more of the suffused radiance that makes it such an affecting swansong.

CPO's sound is admirably detailed if lacking in the last degree of immediacy, and there are informative booklet-notes. Hopefully Bentoiu's own music will be gaining greater exposure during the run-up to his 90th birthday in 2017; for now, this is a self-recommending release.

Richard Whitehouse

Chamber Symphony – selected comparison:

Tampere PO, Lintu (10/12) (ONDI) ODE1196-2

Glazunov • Dvořák • Sibelius

Dvořák Violin Concerto, Op 53 B96

Glazunov Violin Concerto, Op 82

Sibelius Six Humoresques

Efi Christodoulou *vn* Bournemouth

Symphony Orchestra / John Carewe

Somm Céleste ⑤ SOMMCD0153 (73' • DDD)



Somewhere in this Somm release is a more characterful one struggling to get

out. The soloist, the Greek violinist Efi Christodoulou, plays with a sweet tone. And she has done well to avoid the over-crowded corners of the repertoire. Her choices – Sibelius's little known *Humoresques*, sandwiched between violin concertos by Glazunov and Dvořák – offer plenty of scope for making a distinctive mark. If only she always remembered to take advantage of it.

When she does, the results are prepossessing, as in the finale of the Glazunov, where there's a palpable sense of joy in the music-making. As for the rest, there are grace and sweetness in spades, befitting the old-school charm of this too rarely heard concerto. But the terrain could do with more peaks and troughs, along with a little more loving care in the intonation department. For livewire intensity and detail, this reading has nothing on Julia Fischer's, let alone Maxim Vengerov's. Occasionally Christodoulou is even outmatched by the orchestra, the

Bournemouth Symphony, who, under John Carewe, consistently give their all.

In the Dvořák, Christodoulou fares better. Here we'll find none of the over-indulgence favoured by, say, Anne-Sophie Mutter (DG, 11/13). Instead we're given a straightforward interpretation, not wildly imaginative but better suited to this concerto's childlike honesty. What emerges is a finale full of artless exuberance and a slow movement that lilts as gently as a lullaby. But the most subtle playing is reserved for Sibelius's *Humoresques*, pieces far more rich and substantial than their short running times would suggest. They certainly bring out good things in Christodoulou, who revels in their half-lights and soft shades of grey. **Hannah Nepil**

Glazunov – selected comparisons:

Vengerov, BPO, Abbado (11/95) (WACL) 2564 63151-4

Fischer, RNO, Kreisberg (1/05) (PENT) PTC5186 059

Mahler

Symphony No 7

Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra / Riccardo Chailly

Accentus ⑤ DVD ACC20309; ⑤ ACC10309

(84' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,

DTSS1 & PCM stereo • 0)

Recorded live 2014



Developed and then fine-tuned in Leipzig over the last decade, Chailly.2 really does come with a different operating system. Briskly fired up, it fairly purrs through the data-heavy sections of Mahler's Seventh. If only all updates were as consistently effective.

The first movement's beat is a debased version of the Fifth Symphony's funeral march which, in its steady accumulation of energy, results in a coda of roaring ambivalence, the triumph enjoyed for the moment like a well-directed first act of *Die Walküre*. This used to be considered Mahler's most 'problematic' single movement but Chailly conducts a structural masterclass. He marks an emphatic arrival on the brass cadence to close the first subject around five minutes in, and marshals the luscious second theme like a piece of the new Leoncavallo or early Strauss which Mahler apparently shaped so masterfully even while holding his nose at their frivolous realism. He allows only the most provisional repose for the movement's central interlude. You may do the same at the finale, which is played at full throttle, veering from *Die Meistersinger* to Rameau's airs and dances like a symphonic Dr Strangelove, hilarious or terrifyingly empty according to inclination.

What really distinguishes Chailly's Mahler nowadays (from his earlier self but also from most of the competition) is that he pushes through the music with the Italianate passion that Abbado chose to efface over the years: the closest historical parallel is with Bruno Maderna, whose open-invitation 'party in my room' Seventh was last seen on Hunt (Vienna SO, 1967, though his Milan radio recording four years later is far better played and recorded). They leave the irony up to you and me. Thus a brighter light than usual is shone on the two *Nachtmusik* movements, while the shadows run deeper as solo harp then cello then flute then trumpet bring about the second movement's reprise in a carnival-mask passing of the baton from Bruckner to Webern.

The balance on film (and the radio broadcast of the second of three concerts edited together here) favours trilling flutes and manic percussion but allows plenty of room for that guttural Leipzig brass and bass, which has surely never sounded finer. The holes in the middle are partly Mahler's doing in his most experimental orchestration. **Peter Quantrill**

Mahler

Symphony No 10 (realised Cooke)

Montreal Metropolitan Orchestra /

Yannick Nézet-Séguin

ATMA Classique ⑤ ACD2 2711 (79' • DDD)

Recorded live at Maison Symphonique, Montreal, October 2014



Given that it was Yannick Nézet-Séguin's tonally luxuriant Philadelphia

Orchestra that made the first commercial recording of the reconstructed Tenth under Eugene Ormandy, it is something of a puzzle to find him setting down this of all works live in Montreal. His loyalty to the Orchestre Métropolitain is the stuff of legend but at times there is a sense of struggle. However silent the audience, you'd never mistake the present release for a squeaky-clean studio recording from one of the bigger names. As followers of the conductor will know, Nézet-Séguin can be mesmerically slow and oddly tensionless in late-Romantic repertoire. We've some of that here too.

In the absence of a definitive score, the range of interpretative possibilities is wider in Mahler's Tenth than in any of his completed symphonies. Those who grew up with Deryck Cooke's performing version via Simon Rattle's serial renderings

will spot that Nézet-Séguin does not follow him in replacing the bassoon line with a bass clarinet in bars 162-64 of the opening *Adagio* (Mahler not only left no indication, he didn't actually write the solo). A number of accidentals are read another way but the main difference is one of tone. Rattle is altogether more interventionist in his desire to present the music as a masterpiece worthy of revival. Nézet-Séguin, seemingly intent on conjuring radiant Zen-like calm, no doubt sees that particular battle as already won. In Montreal the finale's famous flute solo has a chaste, recorder-like quality, with a breathtaking triple *piano* for the entry of the strings. No percussive reinforcements impinge on the return of the *Adagio*'s piled-up breakdown chord. Earlier, between the fourth and fifth movements, there sits that non-functional drum stroke edited out by Rattle: unsuspecting listeners might attribute its retention to an editing fault. The Canadian thuds are louder than Rattle's in Berlin, less earth-shattering than in Bournemouth. (Riccardo Chailly has lately tried prefacing the main beats with extra grace notes to simulate a tattoo!)

ATMA Classique's documentation isn't giving much away and one can't help pining for the detailed explanatory superstructure of Rattle's Bournemouth LP set (HMV, 12/80 – nla). Perhaps those who find even his Berlin remake hyperactive will welcome Nézet-Séguin's more passive approach. The less grainy sound obtained in the open acoustic of the Maison Symphonique is certainly a plus.

David Gutman

Selected comparison:

BPO, Rattle (5/00[®]) (EMI) 500721-2

Mozart

Piano Concertos – No 8, K246;

No 11, K413; No 13, K415

Ronald Brautigam *fp*

Cologne Academy / Michael Alexander Willens

BIS (©) BIS2074 (68' • DDD/DSD)



An odd suggestion, perhaps, but start by playing the *Larghetto* of K413. Conductor

Michael Alexander Willens sets the scene, the musicians readily responding to his feel for melody, its rise and fall in the orchestral exposition contoured by microscopic *rubatos* and elastic shaping. Enter Ronald Brautigam in the ninth bar and the momentum continues, mood-set unbroken. The Alberti bass accompaniment that runs almost continuously isn't a continuously

monotonous clatter. Subtle variations in tone and articulation match a singing line from the right hand, the written cadenza enhanced through expressive detail.

This sort of artistry suffuses the whole production. Here is Brautigam at his best, a quality not regularly experienced in other performances within his Mozart concerto series. You will not hear those touches of brusque coarseness and prosaic indifference that often marred the picture. Instead he matches Willens in portraying the gamut of varying characteristics in these works with an intensity that is both robust and refined. The spontaneous impetuosity of the first movement of K246 is one instance; another is the supreme interpretation of the mercurial finale of K415 – trumpets and timpani to the fore in this the grandest of the three concertos, and the only one with parts for bassoons in all movements – operatic in nature, the music switching from C major *Allegro* in 6/8 time to C minor *Adagio* in 2/4, a free-flowing unbarred cadenza in the middle plus the surprise of a quiet ending. Include a nicely transparent SACD recording and you have a very desirable disc. **Nalen Anthoni**

Mozart • Wagner

Mozart Symphony No 40, K550

Wagner *Götterdämmerung*^a – Brünnhilde's Immolation Scene; Dawn, Siegfried's Rhine Journey and Funeral March

^aAnita Väkki *sop* **Hallé Orchestra /**

Sir John Barbirolli

Testament mono (© SBT1508 (66' • ADD)

Recorded live at the Town Hall, Manchester, January 21, 1964



John Barbirolli came to Wagner in an age when orchestras were often smaller, pitch

lower, and good conductors routinely versed in the art of cossetting singers. As Mike Ashman reminds us in his note, Barbirolli's earliest Wagner recordings were made with such stars of a golden age of Wagner-singing as Lauritz Melchior and Frida Leider.

Had Anita Väkki (1926-2011) been born into such an age, she might have had a longer career singing Wagner. She didn't soar and burn as did the likes of Ludmila Dvořáková and Ursula Schröder-Feinen in that newly hectic age which was the 1960s. She simply did her bit then stepped off the international Wagner treadmill to return to her native Finland.

She first appeared in England in 1961, when Solti engaged her to sing Brünnhilde

in a new Covent Garden production of *Die Walküre*. (A live BBC transmission is now available – Testament, 4/15). Here, as there, she reveals herself to be a Brünnhilde of lyric grace: bright-toned but not over-bright, good with words. Barbirolli, for whom Frida Leider's fine-spun *legato* and purity of phrase would have been a still active memory, accompanies her superbly. The mono sound coaxed from Manchester Town Hall by the BBC engineers is somewhat recessed and a touch boxy. But the ear adjusts.

As far as I know, Barbirolli made no commercial recording of Mozart's late G minor Symphony. It is, as one might expect, a lyrical reading, lovingly sung through tempi which are unhurrying yet never inert. Like Bruno Walter in his late Columbia SO recording (Sony, 12/63), Barbirolli treats the first movement as an *Allegro assai*. Mozart's marking is *Molto allegro*, a tempo which can electrify sense but which in the wrong hands can mask that deeper and no less dramatic strain of melancholy which a slower pulse can reveal.

What shines out here, both in the Mozart and the Wagner, is music-making of unforced humanity under a conductor whose mastery of the nowadays vanishing art of creating and sustaining a properly sung orchestral *legato* is never in question.

Richard Osborne

Mussorgsky • Stravinsky

Mussorgsky *Pictures at an Exhibition* (orch Ravel)^a **Stravinsky** *Petrushka* (1947 version)^b

Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Mariss Jansons

BR-Klassik (© 900141 (70' • DDD). Recorded live at the ^aHerkulesaal, Munich, November 13-14, 2014;

^bPhilharmonie im Gasteig, Munich, April 14-17, 2015



Here is more seemingly effortless music-making from Mariss Jansons. The

interpretations of both pieces being broadly consistent with those he recently released on the RCO label, one is bound to ask why he feels the need to revisit yet again repertoire he also recorded in Oslo in the 1990s. It goes almost without saying that the Bavarians make a glorious noise, perfectly integrated from top to bottom with a delightfully rounded lower-middle, well captured live in two local venues. Indeed, *Petrushka* can rarely have seemed more sheerly beautiful, even when questionable minutiae obtrude. More worrying is the lack of forward thrust in the

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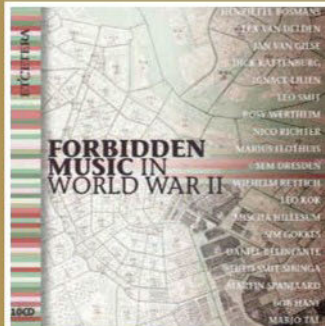
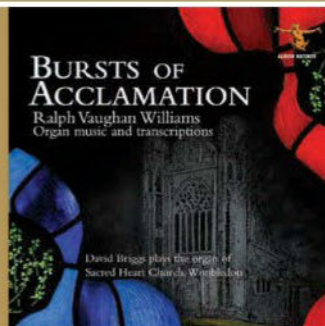
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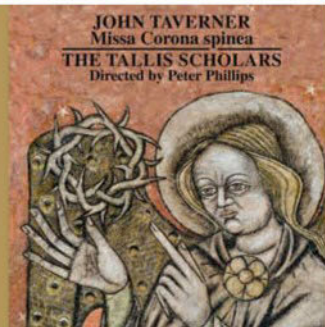
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Symphony Orchestra /
Lionel Friend
Testament SBT3 1496

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'Shrovetide Fair', shimmering and translucent as it is, but then this spacious, hyper-detailed account shows little interest in the trajectory of the plot or in sounding combustibly Slav. It was the same story in Amsterdam (RCO, 2/06).

Given that Ravel himself smooths over Mussorgsky's intentions to some degree, Jansons is arguably on firmer ground in presenting the *Pictures* in bejewelled but deracinated fashion. He takes his time as in 2008, strolling through the galleries rather than revelling in implied psychodrama. He is certainly an attentive observer – the strings characterise 'The Gnome' to the *n*th degree. Elsewhere refinement wins out over excitement, and arriving at 'The Great Gate of Kiev' I had long since begun to pine for something more raucous. There is, however, an impressively real-sounding bell.

Applause is retained after both works and presentation standards are characteristically high. You might object to the hazy photographic image just inside the booklet, though in leaving the conductor a blur and focusing instead on part of Ravel's score it complements Jansons's gentle, self-effacing approach. **David Gutman**

Prokofiev

Symphonies – No 4 (revised version), Op 112;

No 6, Op 111. Symphonic fragment

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra /

Kirill Karabits

Onyx © ONYX4153 (78' • DDD)



No fewer than three recent Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra chiefs have been

recording Prokofiev symphonies, in Bergen and São Paulo as well as in Poole, but it's Kirill Karabits, the present occupant of the post, who emerges ahead of the pack. Time perhaps to take stock of the strengths and weaknesses of a cycle whose main presentational quirk is the inclusion of brief conductor interviews in lieu of contextualising booklet-notes. The music-making itself is never less than scrupulously prepared and judiciously recorded, albeit in a 'difficult', somewhat over-resonant acoustic. Then again, Karabits can seem to favour textural elucidation over high-voltage emotional clout.

If you found his Bournemouth Fifth excessively aerated, you'll know not to expect the blunter heft of Valery Gergiev in the Sixth. Continuity is maintained a little too breezily for my taste, although the finales are close in pacing and conception:

both favour an emotionally authentic and unmarked grinding of gears at the close. Nor does Karabits undersell the horns' painful wheezing over irregular low *pizzicato* heartbeats at the crux of the first movement – a reference to Prokofiev's own hypertensive episodes, in the tradition of the irregular opening pulse of Mahler's Ninth or the heart seizure that implodes the first movement of Nielsen's Sixth.

Listening to Prokofiev's 1947 recasting of his Fourth Symphony, itself an extension of his score for *The Prodigal Son* (the last great ballet of the Diaghilev era), is disquieting in another way, not because the result is knowingly self-referential in the post-modern manner but because it so obviously isn't. In building a would-be heroic 'symphonic' superstructure for his émigré source material, Prokofiev needed his Soviet overseers to forgive and forget. Karabits and his orchestra come across as marginally more convincing than they were in the shorter, lighter symphonic original (9/15). Or is it just that, as the conductor himself suggests, the revision makes a stronger impact on audiences without being necessarily the 'better' work?

The surprise bonus is a premiere recording of the surviving shard of the composer's very first symphonic project. You won't listen to it much – the 11-year-old was no Korngold when it came to precocious creativity – yet there is some indication that Prokofiev's classicism always came with inverted commas attached. **David Gutman**

Symphonies Nos 4 and 6 – selected comparison:

LSO, Gergiev (6/06) (PHIL) 475 7655PM4

Prokofiev

'Peter and the Wolf and Jazz'

Prokofiev Peter and the Wolf

David Tennant narr The Amazing Keystone Big Band

Le Chant du Monde © 2742378 (54' • DDD)

Prokofiev

'Peter and the Wolf in Hollywood'

Prokofiev Peter and the Wolf with excerpts

from works by Elgar, Dukas, Grieg, Mahler,

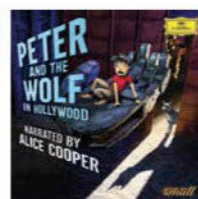
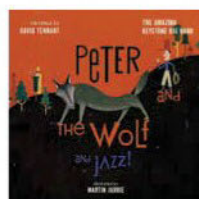
Mussorgsky, Prokofiev, Puccini, Satie,

Schumann, Smetana, Wagner and Zemlinsky

Alice Cooper narr National Youth Orchestra of

Germany / Alexander Shelley

DG © 479 4888GH (50' • DDD)



Two updated versions of *Peter and the Wolf* in the same month? Must be Christmas.

The first is a knock-out arrangement of Prokofiev's score for jazz band, a witty transformation that doffs its cap at Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Quincy Jones and others. The Bird is represented by flute and muted trumpet, the Duck, Cat and Grandfather by soprano, tenor and baritone saxophones respectively, Peter 'by the three stringed instruments' – piano, bass and guitar. The Amazing Keystone Big Band, an 18-piece French outfit, is simply terrific (try the Duck being chased by the Wolf – an improvement even on Prokofiev). The published text of *Peter and the Wolf* is a translation made by a linguist, not a script-writer, and in performance it needs a gifted narrator to lift it off the page. David Tennant does the job brilliantly, with much imaginative word-colouring and just the right level of enthusiasm ('Hello everyone!') without being arch or patronising.

This version may not support the original purpose of introducing children to the instruments of the symphony orchestra but for an introduction to first-class contemporary jazz it could hardly be bettered (seven additional tracks feature big-band arrangements inspired by Prokofiev's themes). Le Chant du Monde's disc comes with a fat booklet beautifully illustrated by Martin Jarrie containing the full text as spoken by Tennant (I just wish they'd noticed that 'ouverture' and 'exemple' are spelt differently in English).

From DG comes 'a bold reimagining of the beloved children's classic, brought spectacularly into the 21st century', as the disc's blurb has it. This prequel to Prokofiev's children's classic, co-written and conceived by three Americans collectively known as Giants Are Small, has poor little orphan Peter flying from Russia to Los Angeles to live with his grandfather, an ageing hippie ('cool, man') who works as a gardener in the grounds of a movie star's house. A wolf escapes from a local zoo, Peter builds a robot to capture it and... well, I won't spoil it for you. Nearly 25 minutes of bits and bobs of (mainly) core classical works are used to illustrate this Hollywood section before it flows seamlessly via Smetana's 'Vltava' into Prokofiev's familiar story and music. Well, up to a point. We are still in Hollywood: for '[duck] pond' read '[swimming] pool', while Prokofiev's huntsmen, emerging from the wood with their guns, become paparazzi 'following the trail of the wolf, shooting as they went'.

It is all rather charming, and an imaginative addition to an old favourite (both sections, by the way, further enlivened by vivid sound effects). Alice Cooper, 'the



Beatrice Rana records in Rome with Sir Antonio Pappano for her concerto debut disc on Warner, featuring works by Prokofiev and Tchaikovsky

Godfather of Shock Rock', would seem to an improbable choice for narrator but, now 67 and the father of four children, he knows how to do a bedtime reading.

The music is played by the crisp and characterful National Youth Orchestra of Germany under the excellent Alexander Shelley (son of Howard). Will this modern fable followed by Prokofiev's classic captivate today's youngsters and get them hooked on classical music? Not for want of trying. Put it under the Christmas tree to find out. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Prokofiev • Tchaikovsky

Prokofiev Piano Concerto No 2, Op 16

Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No 1, Op 23

Beatrice Rana *pf* **Orchestra of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia** / **Sir Antonio Pappano**
Warner Classics © 2564 60090-9 (67' • DDD)



As word began to trickle out from Fort Worth during the 2013 Van Cliburn

Competition, her name kept coming up: the young Italian who had to be heard to be believed. And though she was awarded the silver medal rather than the gold, as she toured Stateside the buzz continued to grow. In a word? Beatrice Rana is fierce!

And not only as a pianist but as a fully developed artist of a stature that belies her tender years. If you've not heard her pre- and post-competition solo recordings (Chopin and Scriabin on ATMA Classique; Schumann, Ravel and Bartók on Harmonia Mundi), you don't want to miss her concerto debut, held aloft in inimitable style by Antonio Pappano and the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia.

This is a Prokofiev Second to conjure with: shapely, subtle, nuanced, musical in every detail. Even via the medium of recording you can sense the hushed focus of the orchestral musicians, intent on reflecting every gesture of the soloist. Rana's lithe and nimble interpretation restores the humanity to this often brutalised score. Her originality is nowhere more evident than in the first-movement development-cum-cadenza, where it's impossible to imagine what is coming next. At the climactic moment, with nowhere else left to turn, Pappano and the Romans arrive in a dazzling display of apocalyptic sonorities that simultaneously overwhelms and consoles. The remarkable thing is what this hand-in-glove collaboration still has in store.

There's a menacing, dry, hyper-articulate *Vivace* that seems over before it has begun, followed by a rhythmically incisive Intermezzo of Mendelssohnian delicacy, its *glissandos* as fine as cobwebs, all of it

culminating in a finale that sheds new light on this concerto's architecture and emotional cohesion.

Space limitations preclude a description of this bejewelled imperial Russian Tchaikovsky Concerto, its life and breath emanating not from any straining after novelty but from a fresh, close reading of a beloved score we all thought we knew. I can't think of another recent concerto release that, beginning to end, affords greater pleasure. *Bravissimo tutti!*

Patrick Rucker

Scriabin

Symphonies - No 3, 'The Divine Poem', Op 43; No 4, 'The Poem of Ecstasy', Op 54

Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra / **Vasily Petrenko**
LAWO Classics © LWC1088 (69' • DDD/DSD)

Scriabin

Symphonies - No 3, 'The Divine Poem', Op 43^a; No 4, 'The Poem of Ecstasy', Op 54^b

London Symphony Orchestra / **Valery Gergiev**
LSO Live © LSO0771 (65' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Barbican, London,
^bMarch 30, 2014, ^aApril 13, 2014



If some composers generate floods of discs when one of their anniversaries comes around, the centenary of Scriabin's death has not been notably inundated, although Yevgeny Sudbin's wonderfully idiomatic performance of the Piano Concerto (BIS, 3/15) and Mikhail Pletnev's coupling of the First Symphony and *The Poem of Ecstasy* have handsomely attested to the advantages of quality over quantity. Now, two rival discs of *The Poem of Ecstasy* (or Symphony No 4) and *The Divine Poem* (Symphony No 3) have been released in the same month, Vasily Petrenko's performances with the Oslo Philharmonic having been recorded in February this year, Valery Gergiev's with the LSO stemming from concerts at London's Barbican in 2014.

Petrenko has the distinct edge here. Where Gergiev's approach in *The Divine Poem*, while passionate and emotionally highly charged, can sound generalised, Petrenko is far more alert to the music's shifting moods, paces and dynamics, finding expressive potential in those evanescent, volatile gestures that make the substance of the symphony at once so rich and so restless. It's not that you necessarily expect a conductor to fix precisely in musical terms what Scriabin meant by

such markings as 'avec trouble et effroi, de plus en plus audacieux' or 'orageux', but they do tell you something about the music's febrile nature, its startling spurts of energy, its ominous radiance, its fusion of momentum and, as Scriabin would say, 'ravissement'. Petrenko can build up a pulsating climax in the finale along with the best of them, as indeed can Gergiev. It is simply that, throughout *The Divine Poem*, Petrenko, with his refined attention to texture and detail, makes the score sound so much more intriguing, so much more unusual.

In *The Poem of Ecstasy* Petrenko and Gergiev have Pletnev's interpretation to compete with, a performance of truly ecstatic headiness. Nor can one ignore Svetlanov's 1996 version (Warner, 5/07) or Muti's Philadelphia recording of 1990 (EMI, 7/91 – nla), both of them part of complete Scriabin symphony series and, in their different ways, capturing the music's spirit.

In the great scheme of things it's a minor quibble, maybe, but the first chord in Gergiev's performance is not quite unanimous. As an interpretation, however, it works well in its flexibility and in the mix of seductive languor, nervy animation and healthy solo trumpet aspiration.

Again, though, Petrenko is the more impressive: his performance has all those qualities but there just seems to be a sharper focus and a keener ear for the intricacies of Scriabin's world of sound.

Geoffrey Norris

Poem of Ecstasy – selected comparison:

Russian Nat Orch, Pletnev (8/15) (PENT) PTC5186 514

Sibelius

Scaramouche, Op 71

Turku Philharmonic Orchestra / Lelf Segerstam

Naxos @ 8 573511 (71' • DDD)



We have reached the sixth and final instalment in this fascinating series from

Turku. It's given over to just one work, namely Sibelius's extensive score for Poul Knudsen's dance pantomime *Scaramouche*. The composer signed a formal contract for the commission with the publisher Wilhelm Hansen on Midsummer's Day 1913 – by which time problems had already started to surface. Not only was Sibelius dismayed by the scenario's uncomfortable similarity to Arthur Schnitzler's *Veil of Pierrette* (for which Dohnányi had provided incidental

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FOUR FOUR SEASONS AND A DAY

William Yeoman immerses himself in Vivaldi's evergreen and ever-various concertos



Succeeding with excess: Nigel Kennedy returns to The Four Seasons with his Orchestra of Life on Sony Classical

Every performance is an act of recomposition; it's merely a matter of degree. So when the Reviews Editor sent this bunch of (mostly) unusual *Four Seasons* recordings along with a jolly 'Just in case you haven't heard enough of 'em', I was not afraid. After all, I had survived everything from Red Priest's deranged bacchanal and Jacques Loussier's winter wine bar to Max Richter's coolly minimalist *Recomposed Four Seasons* and YouTube sensation Tina S playing a thrash metal version of the *Presto* from *Summer*. Then there are the various autonomous works that owe much of their inspiration to Vivaldi's original, again in varying degrees; one such is Piazzolla's beautiful *Estaciones Porteñas*. However, the prospect of listening to Kennedy's *New Four Seasons* did weaken my resolve somewhat...

But let's ease into things with an unfussy yet highly considered recording by Canadian violinist **James Ehnes** with the Sydney Symphony. Not for Ehnes the velocity and histrionics that first dazzle then quickly bore; his is the kind of 'classic' mainstream, historically informed approach that one could live with for a long time. That's in no way a euphemism for bog-standard: the *Presto* of *Summer* is as thrilling as the *Largo* of *Spring*, sparsely

yet tastefully ornamented and delicately expressive; there is also a robustness in *Autumn's* opening movement that finds its reflective counterpart in a richly *cantabile Largo* in *Summer*. Equal billing should go to Ehnes's flavoursome, Romantic accounts of Kreisler's arrangement of Tartini's *Devil's Trill* and Leclair's *Tambourin* sonatas, encore staples in which he is ably supported by pianist Andrew Armstrong – a good reason to purchase this recording should your *Four Seasons* cup already run over.

Set Vivaldi's accompanying sonnets to music and present those settings together with the *Four Seasons* – why hasn't anybody thought of it before? Contemporary composer Oliver Davis's *Anno* and the pendant *Anno epilogue* are inspired, works that, while more Classic FM than BBC Radio 3 and more Michael Nyman than Toshio Hosokawa (more of him anon), provide a sophisticated and tasty entrée and dessert to the main course, especially as sung here by Baroque specialist soprano Grace Davidson with impeccable diction and a sweet, floating tone. And that main course? Soloist **Kerenza Peacock's** playing exudes *sprezzatura* (if that's not a contradiction in terms), her tone light and incisive, her ornamentation authentic yet imaginative – I loved the exuberant tirade

leading to *Spring's Allegro pastorale* – her collegiate joy evident in every dance step she takes with the wonderful Trafalgar Sinfonia under Ivor Setterfield.

Here's where we ratchet it up, with the extraordinary Romani fiddler **Roby Lakatos's** first recording of *The Four Seasons*, replete with extraordinary genre-bending compositions by Kálmán Cséki: *Alpha* – 'Genesis', 'Noah', 'Abraham' and 'Golgotha'; and *Omega* – 'Apocalypse' and 'Armageddon' (the titles tell you all you need to know); as well as Patriarch Ilia II of Georgia's unashamedly lyrical *Ave Maria*. What's immediately striking about Lakatos's take on Vivaldi's concertos is how restrained and respectful it is. I expected a full-on Hungarian gypsy jazz swingfest; what I heard was Lakatos's gently infusing the music with his inimitable style. Apart from lots of rhythmic liberties (most noticeable in the improvised triplets in *Autumn's* third movement), extravagant gypsy cadenzas and allowing cimbalom player Jenő Lisztes not just to realise the continuo line but to take the solo line from time to time, it's only in the relaxed gypsy jam session of *Winter's Largo* where you feel everyone's finally throwing caution to the icy winds.

Here's where we really ratchet it up. That the artist now known as **Kennedy**

virtually built a career on playing *The Four Seasons* by staying just this side of respectability goes without saying. But where Lakatos surprises by his show of restraint, Kennedy in his *New Four Seasons* surprises by succeeding with excess. Not that there's wholesale recomposing here; as always, Kennedy is respectful of the score. But by (presumably improvising) anachronistically modern links between the movements and enlisting the likes of Z-Star, former Amy Winehouse collaborator Xantoné Blacq, former Echo and the Bunnymen drummer Damon Reece and other luminaries from rock, jazz, blues and various other popular and world-music genres, he actually gets closer to the spirit of Vivaldi's rambunctious bucolic sound canvases. Listen to the seductively whispered 'Tweet tweet' by one of the Orchestra of Life's female members in *Spring* and the raucous barking as band members imitate rustics imitating dogs in *Autumn*: wonderful touches of humour amid the driving drums, wild electric guitar cadenzas, pulsating synths and, of course, Kennedy's punk-violin aesthetic in this utterly exhilarating recording.

Let us, however, finish on a gentle note with a beautiful recording that, while not strictly of the *Four Seasons* variety, erects a musical scaffold upon four concertos that take us through the course of a single day, from the end of one night to the beginning of the next. The five movements of Toshio Hosokawa's delicate, tinkling *Singing Garden in Venice* (2011) bookend and link four of Vivaldi's Op 10 concertos – *La notte*, *Il gardellino*, *La tempesta di mare* and *La festa* – all performed by recorder player **Jeremias Schwarzer** and the superb Holland Baroque. The effect is ravishing. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Vivaldi *The Four Seasons, etc*
Ehnes; Sydney SO
Onyx (P) ONYX4134



Vivaldi *The Four Seasons, etc*
Peacock; Trafalgar Sinf / Setterfield
Signum (P) SIGCD437



Vivaldi *The Four Seasons, etc*
Lakatos; Brussels CO
Avanti Classic (P) AVANTI10422



Vivaldi *The New Four Seasons*
Kennedy; Orch of Life
Sony Classical (P) 88875 07672-2



Vivaldi, Hosokawa *Sounds & Clouds*
Schwarzer; Holland Baroque
Channel Classics (P) CCSSA37615

music in 1907), the sheer scale of the undertaking – well over an hour of uninterrupted music – was seriously fraying his nerves. Nevertheless, by the end of 1913 the score was complete, though it was to be a further nine years before the pantomime was successfully staged in Copenhagen.

Shrewdly scored for a small orchestra (including a piano), this elusive yet obstinately haunting 71-minute canvas is by no means devoid of beguiling grace, poetic imagination and intrigue, not least some frequent stylistic – and even thematic – points of contact with, among other offerings, the hugely underrated second set of *Scenes historiques*, *The Oceanides* and (perhaps most strikingly) the radiant *Allegro moderato* at the heart of the Seventh Symphony (ideas for which were evidently already forming in Sibelius's mind). Leif Segerstam masterminds a characteristically unhurried, atmospheric display and proves especially adept at teasing out every drop of sinister unease and harmonic daring from the music of the duetting solo viola and solo cello associated with the hunchback Scaramouche. What's more, his polished band is with him every step of the way. Excellent sound and truthful balance, too.

What an absorbing journey of discovery this series has proved to be; congratulations to everyone involved! **Andrew Achenbach**

Sibelius

Complete Symphonies (Nos 1-7)

Lahti Symphony Orchestra / Okko Kamu
BIS (M) (3) BIS2076 (4h' • DDD/DSD)



The close proximity of Simon Rattle's latest survey of the symphonies with

the majestic Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra only serves to highlight the stark difference in approach adopted by Okko Kamu and his leaner lither, Lahti Symphony. Actually, it is the character and sound of that orchestra that makes the difference, with cleaner contours, sharper reflexes and, from the BIS engineers, a greater immediacy of the all-important woodwind voices. Inner parts are thrown into sharp relief. It enables Kamu to highlight the harmonic daring of the music and to move it from stasis to action almost instantaneously.

Of course, one occasionally misses the tonal splendour of such orchestras as the Berlin Philharmonic, be it for Rattle or Karajan, and the famed Berlin string basses anchor this music in ways that the markedly lighter Lahti section cannot.

Kamu's violins, too, are thin by comparison with the world's finest, and the big tunes of the First and Second symphonies might be found wanting by some. But there are significant benefits to be had from greater mobility, and the rhythmic nature of this music is far better served here than by the somewhat ungainly Berliners. Osmo Vänskä has taught us how vital that is to the imperative of these pieces – and his cycle with the Lahti orchestra remains super-compelling.

But Kamu has a view, a very personal one, and what he always catches is the intrigue of this music. He is self-evidently inquisitive and, familiar though the music undoubtedly is to him, he always gives us a sense of 'exploration', of not quite knowing where we might be headed next. The pale clarinet solo at the opening of the First Symphony is like an intrepid explorer, scenting the unknown at the start of the journey. It is quite magically and mysteriously shaded. And when did you last hear the dissonance quite so exposed in the first gusty *tutti*? Nor is Kamu afraid to create space in moments of stasis; a change in the complexion of the landscape is always marked by an intensifying of the atmosphere therein. Some readers may recall Kamu's debut recording of the Second Symphony with the Berlin Philharmonic from 1970. The younger man was showing off, grossly exaggerating the gaping silences that punctuate the brassy, elemental upheavals of the second movement. Such excesses have since been ironed out, though he still capitalises on the contrasts both in tempo and dynamics. I love the really hyper-*vivacissimo* of the *scherzo* here. By contrast, the arrival, on the crest of gleaming horn fanfares, of the famous tune in the finale is fiercely traditional in its expansiveness.

If I'm honest, I think the Karajans and Rattles better serve – in sonic terms – the Wagnerian orations of the Fourth Symphony's two slow movements, though Kamu is certainly in tune with the epic spareness of the piece. His string basses may not be sunk too deep to fathom at the opening of the piece, but the sage old voice of the cello solo that follows conveys a melancholy that has nothing to do with beauty of sound and everything to do with wisdom long acquired. There is often an intimacy about the reading, a sense of being drawn in, as when 'indeterminate' passages (in the first and third movements) suddenly reflect an unease in nature.

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Maria Lettberg, piano

ES 2058

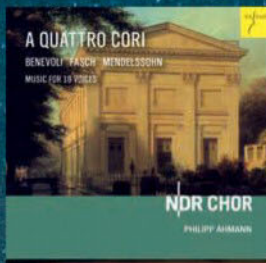


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Where rhythm and concision are everything – in the Third and Sixth Symphonies – Kamu and his orchestra are fresh and engaging. In the Third he manages to be tight and rhythmic but also open and airy, and there is a homespun quality about the middle movement, especially in the passage for solo strings. The Sixth is all about pellucidity and the keenness of light reflecting off its cool clean surfaces. The classical abstraction of this piece leaves some cold, but I am intrigued by how it manages to be at once detached and involving.

There are better accounts of the Fifth in the catalogue, including Rattle and Colin Davis, but there is no escaping Kamu's personal connection with this landscape or the abiding logic of these performances, and the brassiness of the Lahti trumpets makes for a bright new day in the romping coda of the first movement. But again, here and elsewhere in the cycle – the opening of the Seventh – I am conscious of a pervading lightness in the bass-lines; a lack of depth and heft.

So no more of an overall recommendation than with Rattle, and of the home-grown practitioners I still incline towards Vänskä. But Kamu's readings make sound musical and intellectual sense, and, more importantly, hold fast to the music's innate mystery. The hopeful C major barely established before being cut short at the close of the Seventh is perhaps the most tantalising unanswered question in 20th-century music. And so it remained.

Edward Seckerson

Symphonies – selected comparisons:

Labri SO, Vänskä (10/11) (BIS) BIS-CD1933/5
BPO, Rattle (9/15) (BPH) BPHR150071

Vivaldi

'Teatro alla moda'

Violin Concertos – RV228; RV282; RV313;
 RV314a; RV316; RV322; RV323; RV372a; RV391.
 Arsilda regina di Ponto – Ballo primo.

L'olimpiade – Sinfonia

Gli Incogniti / Amandine Beyer *vn*

Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2221 (73' • DDD)



Finding a marketing angle on a new Vivaldi concerto release is sometimes

an exercise in harmless deception, so it is good when, as here, it's based on an original and music-based concept strongly and honestly delivered. 'Teatro alla moda' takes its title from the waspish satire on the early 18th-century Venetian operatic scene

penned by the aristo composer Benedetto Marcello. Marcello had Vivaldi's shameless showmanship securely in his crosshairs, but while this disc opens with the brilliantly nervy overture to *L'olimpiade*, this is not an opera-based programme: rather, Amandine Beyer's exciting young group have gleefully thrown Marcello's criticisms back in his face by showing not just how vivid Vivaldi's theatricality can be, but that it shows itself in its greatest depth in his concertos rather than his stage works.

That takes imagination and an inquisitive mind – these are not well-known concertos – but what really makes this programme work is that the concept is fully realised in the playing of it. Every work here is a drama peopled with characters who make entrances, deliver monologues, start conversations. Naturally the solo violin is the lead, and Beyer laments deeply in the single-movement RV314a, flexes macho muscles in the crazy cadenza to RV228, ornaments entrancingly in RV372a and ensnares in the hypnotic final solo of RV391. Her buzzing reconstructed *violino in tromba* in RV313 is a Rabelaisian grotesque, either dancing coarsely or whining *sotto voce* for some unattainable love. But the ritornellos do more than fill the spaces between: listen to the sudden *piano* in the opening of RV282's first movement, the withdrawal into introspection in the first ritornello of RV322 or the explosive tumult that opens RV323. And the whole of RV391, with its soloist in ghostly *scordatura*, casts a sinister veil of nocturnal intrigue. All this is achieved without tearing the music apart: flow, colour, lyricism and poise combine, and Vivaldi's spirit lives to command the stage.

Lindsay Kemp

'Giovincello'

Boccherini Cello Concerto No 2, G479

Graziani Cello Concerto

Haydn Cello Concerto No 1, Hob.VIIb/1

Platti Cello Concerto

Vivaldi Cello Concerto, RV419

Edgar Moreau *vc*

Il Pomo d'Oro / Riccardo Minasi

Erato © 2564 60526-6 (80' • DDD)



When the young French cellist Edgar Moreau released his debut album last year

(6/14) it was with a relatively soft tread, his programme of concert miniatures for cello and piano drawing our attention to his mature tone, romantic leanings, athletic

prowess and expressive qualities but without presenting anything with which to frighten the horses. By contrast, 'Giovincello' (an affectionate Italian term for 'young man') is something of an explosion.

The centrepiece is a warmly buoyant reading of Haydn's Concerto in C which contains surprises that sound rebelliously deviant on paper but which somehow work bewitchingly well in these musicians' hands: what could only be described as the 'Baroque-ing' of the second movement's opening theme, for instance, reassigning its note values so as to transform previously equally weighted notes into mere ornamentations of others. It would be interesting to know whether this idea came from conductor Riccardo Minasi or from Moreau himself, and no doubt it'll be too libertarian for some. However, although I'd be leading the protest if it were to start a trend, here it's unexpectedly charming. Then there's the tempo of the third movement, which is taken at such a hold-on-to-your-hats pace that it leaves even Jean-Guihen Queyras's 2004 recording, probably the previous record-holder for speed, in its dust. It makes for a slightly pushed-sounding continuo line; but the strings of *Il Pomo d'Oro* remain tightly together through this group virtuoso challenge, while Moreau himself has plenty of capacity left for expression, combined with an accuracy of intonation that's frankly exhilarating.

In fact, Moreau's 'giovincello' qualities are what this disc is all about. The balance is engineered so as to place his singing, silkily intense and muscular tone absolutely in the foreground, along with the sound of his fingerboard and his gasps of exertion. Equally noticeable is the way in which he meets the orchestra's exceptionally crisp period attack with a subtle romanticism typified by elegant little *portamentos*; evidently Moreau is playing according to how he feels the music, rather than being tied to concerns of 'authenticity'.

The disc feels slightly one of two halves thanks to the all-Italian programme that follows the Haydn, but the second half is just as enjoyable; the Vivaldi's dramatic final movement is the perfect vehicle for Moreau's *en pointe* virtuosity, while the aria-like central movement of Graziani's concerto leaves us in no doubt as to his ability to sculpt extended phrases with poetry and sense of line. **Charlotte Gardner**

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Vivaldi's Gloria

Alexandra Coghlan talks to **Hervé Niquet** about going back to basics in this choral favourite

I'm sitting in the impossibly elegant 19th-century apartment in the centre of Paris's 2nd arrondissement that Baroque ensemble Le Concert Spirituel call their home. Across the table from me, somewhere between polished parquet floor and moulded cornicing, Artistic Director Hervé Niquet is impersonating a chicken. In fact, he's impersonating two.

'Bwaagh, bwaagh bwaagh, bwaaaaagh...' There's a pause and a look of expressive, Gallic horror. 'I find it so difficult now to listen to this piece with just two soloists as it's usually done,' Niquet explains. 'I really do feel like I'm listening to two hens squawking at one another.'

The music in question is the 'Laudamus te' from Vivaldi's *Gloria*, RV589, one of several solo movements rendered oddly unfamiliar in Niquet's new recording, which shuns the now-traditional SATB forces in favour of Vivaldi's original version for women's voices. Solo movements – even the delicate 'Domine Deus' – become unison affairs, sung by up to 12 voices, while contrapuntal sections take on new and startling melodies, as 'tenors' jostle with sopranos for the melodic line.

'Everybody knows this piece,' says Niquet, 'and I wanted to find another angle on it. After we first performed this version there was a real sense of wonder and surprise among the audience: they had discovered something new in a very familiar work. The piece is completely transformed – you hear your memories of it but don't recognise what you are hearing, it's a sensual surprise.'

The biggest surprise of all, however, after hearing Niquet's performance is to take a look at the score of this original version and realise that – in fact – nothing has changed. Vivaldi adjusted none of the part-writing in adapting the work for mixed singers, merely restoring the bass and tenor lines to their original octave and allowing contrapuntal chance to do the rest. So why bother making the edition at all?

'The version for mixed voices was produced by Vivaldi for purely commercial reasons – just as he did with his *Magnificat* and many other motets. When you compose music for a nunnery or, in this case an all-female orphanage – Venice's Ospedale della Pietà – you have no men, but you still want to have four vocal parts, so you make do with what you have. It's pragmatic – if you don't have any singers you get the flute to play the soprano part. People still understand that it's the 'Kyrie'.'



Hervé Niquet and Le Concert Spirituel bringing Venetian magic to Paris

Niquet himself, inspired by the pragmatism of Vivaldi and his contemporaries, has made some changes of his own, swapping the solo oboe and trumpet of the original – a texture synonymous with Venice, where it became the signature for music of St Mark's – for strings, further intensifying the heady, high harmonics of this version.

'In sections like the "Propter magnam gloriam", wherever you're used to hearing an interval of a ninth in mixed-voices it becomes a second. The speed of vibration becomes much faster, there's a much greater sense of harmonic tension, of excitement. It's the reason so many men came to listen to the all-female choir of the Pietà: the sound was just so sexy. That's true throughout, but especially in the four-part writing.'

Philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau was just one of the many men fascinated by the Pietà choir, lamenting the 'accursed grills' that permitted him to hear, but not see, the singers. Sneaking his way in one day he was, however, horrified to discover that 'scarcely one was without some considerable blemish' – an object lesson in drawing back art's veil of illusion. But it was an illusion consciously and deliberately fostered by the orphanage, whose musical achievements were essential to its survival.

'The reason that every church in Europe contracted the finest composers to write for them was pretty cynical. It was



The historical view

Jean-Jacques Rousseau
Confessions (1782)

'Vespers ... are performed in barred-off galleries solely by girls. I can conceive of nothing as voluptuous, as moving as this music. What grieved me was these accursed grills, which allowed only tones to go through.'

HC Robbins Landon
Vivaldi: Voice of the Baroque (1993)

'This *Gloria* is possibly the most accessible and immediately comprehensible of all Vivaldi's sacred music – the *Four Seasons* of its genre.'

Karl Heller
Vivaldi – The Red Priest of Venice (1997)

'After Vivaldi's *Gloria* became known in our time, there was considerable speculation as to whether Bach had been familiar with Vivaldi's *Gloria*, and modelled his B minor Mass after it.'

so that everyone in the town knew that, at this particular church, you could hear the best music available, for free. But of course afterwards there would be a collection...'

It was with one eye to such concerns that Vivaldi was encouraged to fulfil the role of interim choirmaster at the Pietà from 1713 to 1717, contracted to compose a daunting number of new works each year for the 70-strong Coro, which in 1715 included not only the *Gloria* but also, 'a complete Mass, a Vespers, an oratorio, over 30 motets and other labours'.

With the female tenors and basses singing up the octave while instrumental bass parts (organ, cellos, double basses) remain at pitch, this all-female *Gloria* achieves unusual resonance and architectural clarity owing to its doubled octaves. For Niquet, this can only be a good thing. 'The sin of parallel octaves is the invention of the 19th century. Yes, it's prudent not to write octaves in different parts, but it can be so effective dramatically – it has real strength. Think of organ music, of the impact of the 16ft. Here it's even richer: we have 16ft, 8ft and 4ft in the texture. The harmonics of this female ensemble are very high, so if you don't have a properly grounded bassline it all gets too nasal. Plus there's the additional harmonic drama. Every modulation, every shift of tonic, doubled at the octave, feels like a much bigger distance and a more extreme gesture.'

No movement is more startling, more unexpected in its harmonic drama than the 'Et in terra pax'. After the rollicking semiquaver jollity of the opening, this 'peace on earth' feels like a cruel musical joke – a tentative, fearful peace denied its resolution by restless chromaticism. It's perhaps this music that prompted musicologist Alfredo Casella, who

'This is a prayer from a community, some of whom would spend their entire lives enclosed, behind a screen' – Hervé Niquet

masterminded the first modern performance of the *Gloria* in 1939 after the rediscovery of the manuscript, to comment on the work's 'profound sadness'. For Niquet it's a reflection of the work's birthplace.

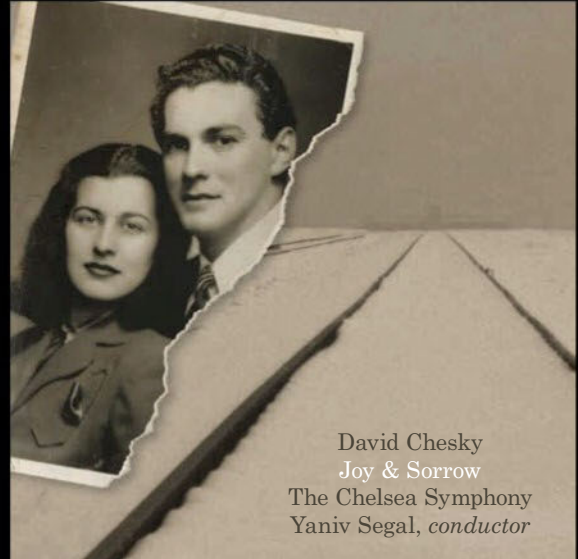
'What is the first thing that strikes you about Venice? Water – water you think is quiet and still but which never is. It's the illusion of calm, always unsettled, always moving. The text of the "Et in terra pax" might be all about peace but it's a distinctively Venetian peace. In the original SSAA version, the chromatic movement is ratcheted up that much more tightly. The melodic call and response both happen at the same octave and is that much more emphatic, more unnerving.

'For me it's actually now strange to hear the SATB version – I find it so poor, so unsatisfying in comparison. It's two-dimensional, flat, whereas the SSAA *Gloria* is three-dimensional – it's alive.'

But for all the *Gloria*'s quasi-operatic scale of gesture and musical effect, Niquet is keen to stress that, for him, this concert-hall staple is not a concert work. 'This is a prayer from a community, some of whom would spend their entire lives enclosed, behind a screen. You need to understand the experience of these women and young girls. It's not enough just to recreate their original sound, you have to also capture their collective emotion in this music.' ⑥

► To read Gramophone's review of Niquet's Vivaldi turn to page 88

David Chesky Joy & Sorrow The Chelsea Symphony Yaniv Segal, *conductor*



David Chesky
Joy & Sorrow
The Chelsea Symphony
Yaniv Segal, *conductor*

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Chamber



Lindsay Kemp listens to The King's Consort in Purcell trio sonatas:

'There is a sweet grace and clarity to these new performances that makes for pleasant listening indeed' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 63**



Kate Molleson welcomes duets from Patricia Kopatchinskaja:

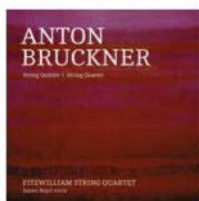
'She plays, sings, narrates and laughs with fierce commitment and unbound, hot-blooded expression' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 67**

Bruckner

String Quartet. String Quintet³. Intermezzo³

Fitzwilliam Quartet; James Boyd *va*

Linn © CKD402 (76' • DDD)



This first 'period' recording of Bruckner's String Quintet may overturn

some preconceptions. When writing it in 1879, the composer was still working through the contrapuntal mania to which he had given voice in the Fifth Symphony (completed immediately before beginning work on the Quintet), and there are modulating sequences in the first movement's recapitulation that anticipate the Ninth's finale, tied up in harmonic knots but jerked forward by the composer's dotted rhythm of fate. The Fitzwilliams and James Boyd loosen the straitjacket and give these episodes the space they need. The relaxed swing they bring to the *Scherzo* and Trio recalls the Fifth like no previous recording: both movements sit back and watch the fun like a doctor of philology in the corner of a beer garden. The quality of patience prized by Robert Simpson in Bruckner is honoured by the Fitzwilliams, at least until the codas of the outer movements, where they push on to skirt the trappings of symphonic grandiloquence to which the piece is just occasionally prone.

In a long and useful booklet-note, Alan George, the quartet's founding viola player, lays out their performing principles, which (guess what?) in practice come back round to share the pitch and spacious confidence of the Amadeus Quartet, with important differences: more vocally inflected *portamento* (revealing the 'surprisingly modern operatic dimension' of the work: John Williamson in the CUP Bruckner *Companion*) and less vibrato, though there is enough of it in Lucy Russell's first violin to let the glorious main theme of the *Adagio* take wing.

The Intermezzo (an unused replacement for the quintet's *Scherzo*) and early quartet (effortfully imitated Schubert and Mendelssohn) are no less stylishly done, but the Quintet should find new friends for Bruckner and for what Russell shrewdly values as the 'sense of unravelling time and space' to be treasured in his music.

Peter Quantrill

Granados • Turina

Granados Piano Quintet, Op 49

Turina Piano Quintet, Op 1. Caliope, Op 93 No 9

Javier Perianes *pf* **Quiroga Quartet**

Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2226 (51' • DDD)



Javier Perianes here champions two chamber works by composers who hailed

from Andalusia, as indeed does he. Perianes has shown on his previous Harmonia Mundi discs of Mendelssohn, Falla, Mompou, Schubert and other composers that he is a pianist of impeccable, refined tastes, blessed with warmth of touch.

These are qualities that he applies to haunting effect in the languid, sultry central movement of Granados's G minor Quintet of 1895, a gentle *Allegretto quasi andantino* in which the atmosphere, musical ideas and harmonic colouring identify the piece as being indisputably of Spanish origin. Elsewhere, Granados seems to have garnered some of his influence from Grieg, with little evidence that his Parisian musical studies during the 1880s had rubbed off to any great degree. But the Quintet is a score with personality, in which Perianes and the Cuarteto Quiroga create a strong and supple bond of ensemble, finding characterful contrasts in the finale between zesty momentum and the little moments of reflective calm that from time to time halt the flow.

The Quintet is by no means over-represented in the catalogue but some might already have it as part of Martha

Argerich and friends' compilation from Lugano in 2010 (EMI), in which the pianist is Gabriela Montero. This new one, however, is the one to go for if coming to the work for the first time, particularly as it is coupled with an equal rarity, the G minor Piano Trio (1907) by Turina. This is a piece that attests both to its Spanishness and to the debts that Turina owed to French music (Debussy, Ravel) from his years in Paris. Beautifully written, potent in ideas and neatly structured, it fully merits the luminous, animated, sensitive performance that Perianes and the Quiroga give it.

Geoffrey Norris

Koechlin

Oboe Sonata, Op 58³. Trio d'anches, Op 206³. Au loin, Op 20^c. Sonata à 7^d. Le repos de Tityre, Op 216 No 10^e

Stefan Schilli *abd* *ob/cora* *ob d'amore* ^d**Henrik Weise**

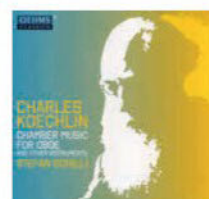
fl ^b**Christopher Corbett** *cl* ^b**Marco Postinghel** *bn*

^d**Daniel Giglberger**, ^d**Heather Cottrell** *vns* ^d**Anja**

Kreynacke *va* ^d**Kristin von der Goltz** *vc* ^d**Cristina**

Bianchi *hp* ^{ac}**Oliver Triendl** *pf*

Oehms © OC1823 (63' • DDD)



Only a fraction of Koechlin's immense output is available on disc, so Stefan

Schilli's survey of his chamber works for oboe is an issue of some importance. A prolific experimenter, Koechlin was nevertheless initially wary of what he called 'the dangerous field of chamber music', and seemingly took time to find his voice in smaller forms.

Twenty years separate *Au loin* (1896) and the Oboe Sonata (1916), with its cool, playful evocation of Attic Greece. Yet they remain stylistically close, and *Au loin*, poised and Fauré-ish, sounds like a trial run for the Sonata's exquisite nocturne. Like Berlioz, whom he temperamentally resembles, Koechlin's genius could waver within the span of a single work, and the Sonata, for all its beauty, meanders a bit.



The Hamlet Piano Trio add their versions of Mendelssohn's piano trios to a bulging catalogue with their new Channel Classics disc

A trio of late works prove revelatory, however. The 1948 oboe d'amore monody *Le repos de Tityre* re-examines the sonata's classical landscapes in a depiction of Tityrus, the contented farmer of Virgil's *Eclogues*. *Sonate à 7*, completed shortly before Koechlin's death, consists of a sequence of dense, fragmentary statements for oboe, flute, harp and string quartet, in which none of the instruments is allotted a dominant role. *Trio d'anches* (1945), for oboe, clarinet and bassoon, marked the end of the compositional silence that Koechlin, fiercely left-wing, maintained during the Second World War. Written polytonally, it's music of uncompromising austerity, Bach-like in its rigour.

Schilli is a superb instrumentalist, engaged, fluid and technically assured throughout. Pianist Oliver Triendl joins him for *Au loin* and the Sonata, the latter fleet-footed, elegant and extrovert – very different from the more reflective approach of Nicholas Daniel and Julius Drake (Virgin – nla). Schilli's colleagues for *Sonate à 7* and *Trio d'anches*, meanwhile, are drawn from the Bavarian RSO, where he is also principal oboist: in both works, the sense of ensemble is flawless. An immaculate disc, beautifully done. **Tim Ashley**

Mendelssohn

Piano Trios – No 1, Op 49; No 2, Op 66

Hamlet Piano Trio

Channel Classics (P) (S) CCSSA36415
(58' • DDD/DSD)



Another month, another Mendelssohn trios disc. This new one from the Hamlet

Trio, a group just four years old, boasts performances that shine with confidence and immediacy, and Paolo Giacometti plays a fine 1837 Erard piano. Good things abound: in the D minor First Trio the second movement's tempo is spot-on, and the piano's opening soliloquy persuasively done, while the *scherzo* sizzles without losing sight of an underlying elegance. The opening *Allegro energico* of the C minor, too, is certainly not short on fire.

But...compared to the best, this doesn't quite hit the spot. Take the recapitulation of the D minor's first movement: where the violin and cello dare to dream so ravishingly in the hands of Oistrakh and Knushevitsky or Heifetz and Piatigorsky, the Hamlet are relatively plain-speaking,

while the piano recitative that follows is less eloquent. Is it unfair to compare with the legends of the past? Well, if that's an issue, then hearing the Hamlet alongside the Fischer/Müller-Schott/Gilad trio in the driving coda is equally telling. And in the *scherzo*, the Florestan have a quiet glee that this new set doesn't quite match.

In the C minor Second Trio, again it's Fischer, Müller-Schott and Gilad who capture most vividly that vital sense of coiled tension that permeates the first movement. For the Hamlet, Giacometti is poised in the *Andante's* opening solo, but Gilad is more poetic still – without seeming contrived – while the Florestan's Susan Tomes is the most lilting of all. In the finale, too, where the piano becomes hymnic in tone (tr 8, 3'01" in the new recording), Gilad and Tomes both convey the idea of quiet communion with a greater inevitably than on this new set.

Harriet Smith

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

Florestan Trio (2/06) (HYPE) CDA67485

Fischer, Müller-Schott, Gilad

(10/06) (PENT) PTC5186 085

Piano Trio No 1 – selected comparisons:

Oistrakh, Knushevitsky, Oborin (10/05) (DORE) DHR7780

Heifetz, Piatigorsky, Rubinstein (RCA) 88725 45145-2

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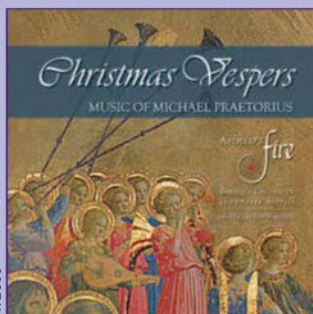
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Purcell

Twelve Sonatas of Three Parts, Z790-801

The King's Consort

Vivat © VIVAT110 (77' • DDD)



There is no particular stylistic distinction between Purcell's two sets

of trio sonatas, despite the fact that one (published in 1683) bore the title *Sonatas of Three Parts* and the other (published posthumously by his widow in 1697) *Sonatas in Four Parts*. Both, in fact, feature four partbooks, respectively for two violins, bass viol and basso continuo, and it seems likely that all the works in them were written around the same time, in the early 1680s. If so, we can assume that the twelve 1683 sonatas, arranged in careful key sequence, were Purcell's first-choice items, and certainly his famous comment – that they were a 'just imitation of the most fam'd Italian masters' – suggests an element of quiet pride. Those Italian masters would have included the likes of Colista, Cazzati, Vitali and (new on the scene) Corelli, and Purcell's reflections of them, with their Italian-language performance instructions, must indeed have seemed quite exotic. Yet the English master's own creative personality, his ravishing melodic gift and restless harmonic fortification are all over them.

The King's Consort have already recorded the 1697 sonatas (8/14), and bring the same musical qualities to bear here. The violinists Cecilia Bernardini and Huw Daniel are first-rate, ideally matched in a transparent but easily sustained and beautiful sound, and the continuo contributions from Reiko Ichise's gamba, Lynda Sayce's theorbo and Robert King's organ and harpsichord are delicately supportive. Some listeners may wish for a little more continuity and force, for instance in those places where a movement seems to want to spill into the next and in those gut-wrenching Purcellian plunges into chromatic disintegration. Yet although the excellent Purcell Quartet describe a more involving flow of events, London Baroque create a richer and weightier eloquence and the Retrospect Trio a firmer and more rhythmic definition, there is nevertheless a sweet grace and clarity to these new performances that makes for pleasant listening indeed. **Lindsay Kemp**

Selected comparisons:

Purcell Qt (1/89, 10/89) (CHAN) CHAN0572/3 (oas)

London Baroque (8/94⁸) (HARM) HMX290 1438/9

Retrospect Trio (12/11) (LINN) CKD374

Rachmaninov

Piano Trio No 2, 'Trio élégiaque', Op 9

Christian Tetzlaff *vn* Tanja Tetzlaff *vc*

Artur Pizzaro *pf*

AVI-Music © AVI8553335 (49' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Hydroelectric Plant WE

Rower AG, Heimbach, Germany, June 12, 2014



There's a big picture of Lars Vogt just inside the booklet. He's not actually playing, but

this disc immortalises a concert given at the Spannungen festival he founded in 1998, a concentrated, vaguely alternative week-long event held annually at the Art Nouveau hydro-electric power station of Heimbach. The word 'Spannungen' denotes 'voltage', 'tension' 'excitement' and 'suspense', and the series has a cult following. On this occasion, the piano stool is occupied by Artur Pizzaro, logically enough since the 1990 Leeds International Piano Competition winner (Vogt came second) is currently recording all Rachmaninov's solo piano music. Christian Tetzlaff might not be the first violinist you think of in connection with Romantic Russia, but with and without his sister Tanja he has set down a remarkable range of repertoire with purity, poise and just enough idiomatic intuition.

'When you come to Heimbach,' says Tanja Tetzlaff, 'it's like coming home.' Collectors have different priorities of course, and those wedded to physical format will probably prefer the *echt* Russian alternative from Boris Berezovsky and friends, if only because their CD finds room for a substantial makeweight in Shostakovich's Second Piano Trio. This one is more in the nature of a sophisticated one-off but deserves to find an audience beyond Germany's Eifel hills. The vibrato favoured by the siblings is less insistent than that of rivals and Pizzaro only pushes his instrument towards hardness at the start of the finale, where the barnstorming rhetoric is difficult to deal with any other way.

The *Trio élégiaque* remains an oddly balanced entity (the composer was only 20 when he wrote it and the score was not published complete in his lifetime), but such a committed and carefully calculated interpretation can only bolster its standing. Be warned that virile and enthusiastic whooping breaks out following the final bars of despondent reprise. There's no hint of the palm court about this expertly engineered production. **David Gutman**

Selected comparisons:

Makhtin, Kniazev, Berezovsky

(4/05) (WARN) 2564 61937-2

Reicha

Wind Quintets – Op 88 No 3; Op 100 No 6.

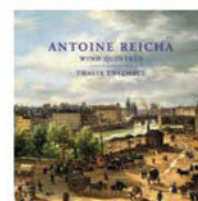
Adagio 'pour le cor anglais'

Belén Nieto Galán *//* Sarah Assmann *ob/cora*

Diederik Ornée *cl* José Rodrigues Gomes *bn*

Hylke Rozema *hn*

Linn © CKD471 (67' • DDD)



The name's Reicha, not Reich. Anton Reicha was born Antonín Rejcha in

Prague, an exact contemporary of Beethoven, whom he befriended in Bonn; later he moved to Paris, where, as Antoine Reicha, he composed a series of 24 wind quintets, introduced in the lobby of the Théâtre Favart in 1817-19, performances that became *the* place to be seen in Parisian society. Not only that, but they were thought of as the finest works in the relatively new wind quintet genre.

They are all four-movement creations, reliant on the tonal and gestural language of Mozart and Haydn, with some of Beethoven's drive in the faster music. Reicha was a flautist and so knew the ins and outs of woodwind-writing, and managed to compose in a style that suited his players and made the most of the varied characters of the five instruments. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the flute often takes the lead, although all the instruments have the spotlight shone upon them, with some notably athletic passages for bassoon, and even the limited natural horn given more to do than simply provide harmonic anchoring. Minuets are in fact *scherzos* in all but name and each quintet opens with a slow introduction. The D minor Adagio darkens the tone by substituting cor anglais for oboe, invoking a sound world less akin to Haydn than to Mozart, with his penchant for dark wind colours.

The Thalia Ensemble (formed in Holland in 2011) recorded these quintets as part of their prize as winners of the 2013 York Early Music Festival Young Artists Competition. Most of the challenges of marshalling ancient instruments are surmounted, notwithstanding occasional trips in fast passages. These are infectious works, intended not to provoke but simply to delight, and in these elegantly shaped performances they do just that.

David Threasher

Saariaho

'Let the Wind Speak'

Tocar^a. Mirrors^b – I; II; III. Couleurs du vent.

Sombre I-III^c. Dolce tormento. Oi Kuu^b.

Laconisme de l'aile

Camilla Hoitenga fls with Daniel Belcher bar

Anssi Karttunen vc H  lo  se Dautry hp

Da Camera of Houston

Ondine   ODE1276-2 (71' • DDD • T/U)



Readers may disagree, but I can't suppress the vague feeling on listening to this disc

that Kaija Saariaho might just be the new Philip Glass – a composer who is having the last laugh as she repeats herself over and over, milking her aesthetic stasis for all its worth. I scribbled in my notes the frequency with which I heard the cello – thoughtfully played by Anssi Karttunen – play a sustained note before tensing up into a tremolo and then collapsing into a distorted downward growl. And that's nothing compared to Saariaho's writing for flutes, which is based on a toolkit of gauche gestures that become clich  d fast.

Way back in *Laconisme de l'aile* (1982) Saariaho was getting her flute to do the 'decay' thing: sending it swooping up to a note from which it drifts downward, losing altitude and power, towards an unspecified point. You hear it in *Couleurs du vent* (1998) and again in the three movements of *Sombre* (2012). When the latter piece introduces a text, nicely sung by Daniel Belcher, at last Saariaho has to react to something constricting; conceptual tramlines which immediately force her to do other things.

Mirrors (1997) presents a rigorous instrumental mirror-game between flute and cello that would be so refreshing were it not heard among so much other music that exposes those instrumental ties and habits. Likewise, Saariaho's vision of wind in *Oi Kuu* (1990) is evocative, individual and blessed with a clear cumulative sense: a journey rather than a snapshot blown up too big.

Camilla Hoitenga's playing is often astonishing, not least in the way she melds her human voice with her instrument's. She frequently speaks text through her flute, too. But that's another repeating gesture from Saariaho that has traversed the decades. It might have seemed new and fertile when separated by years of work in other media. But, concertinaed together on one disc, it becomes one more irritant that keeps on irritating.

Andrew Mellor

Scheidt

Ludi musici

L'Ach  ron

Ricercar   RIC360 (68' • DDD)



University students may still snigger at his name (at least in the UK), but to listen

to Samuel Scheidt's *Ludici musici* is to hear something very near to a synthesis of European styles at the hands of a German composer, long before Bach did so. Dance pairs and fantasias on assorted famous tunes of different nationalities succeed each other in a show of versatility that combines tunefulness, virtuosity, antiphonal effects and affects of all sorts. The opening track, Scheidt's take on Gu  dr  n's famous *Est-ce Mars*, has a little of all of these things.

That the music is worth hearing has never been in doubt, but these performances offer something new. In contrast to Hesp  rion XX's landmark recording for Reflexe in the '70s (12/80 – nla) or the more recent one from Musica Fiata (CPO), which both combined strings, winds and brass, L'Ach  ron opt nearly exclusively for strings. This brings Scheidt closer than he's ever sounded to his English colleagues, the swagger of William Brade in particular. But don't be fooled by the reduced palette, for the continuo section is far more generously stocked than on the earlier recordings. Its detail and bustle is L'Ach  ron's engine-room (try the Alamande No 16), and they in turn are reminiscent of their own English viol consort counterparts. When the mood turns more sombre, however (as in the *Paduan dolorosa*), the paring-down of the continuo does the bowed string players no harm at all.

From a collector's standpoint, L'Ach  ron's selection overlaps significantly with Hesp  rion XX's and far less with Musica Fiata's; that said, my firm preference goes to these gifted newcomers. And though I seldom mention such things, the cover illustration (Cornelis de Vos's painting of his two children) is touchingly appropriate and beautifully reproduced. Without a doubt this is one of the reviewing highlights of my year. **Fabrice Fitch**

Schoenberg • Webern

Verein f  r musikalische
Privatauff  hrungen, Vol 2'

Schoenberg *Pierrot lunaire*^a. F  nf

Orchesterst  cke, Op 16 (arr Greissle). Three

Pieces for Chamber Orchestra, Op *posth*.

Begleitungsmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene,

Op 34 (arr Sch  llhorn/Guittart) Webern Sechs

Orchesterst  cke, Op 6

^aMarianne Pousseur *sprechstimme*

Gruppo Montebello / Henk Guittart

Etcetera   KTC1484 (74' • DDD • T)



The first volume of Henk Guittart and his Gruppo Montebello's series exploring the

milieu surrounding Arnold Schoenberg's Verein f  r musikalische Privatauff  hrungen (Society for Private Music Performances) handed us a chamber version of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony, arranged piecemeal by Hanns Eisler, Erwin Stein and Karl Rankl, to which Guittart added a flute part and prudently reworked the original piano and harmonium parts. Reviewing that first volume (5/15), I commented on the paradox that Guittart's performance had much to teach us about Bruckner's piece – more so in fact than some orchestral performances – while, of course, it could never be considered a top-league recommendation in its own right.

This second volume places us directly inside hardcore Second Viennese School repertoire – Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire* and *Three Pieces* for chamber orchestra alongside chamber reductions of the *Five Orchestral Pieces*, Op 16, and *Accompaniment to a Cinematographic Scene* and Webern's *Six Orchestral Pieces*, Op 6 – and the relationship between the original scores and these mini-me rethinks is suddenly more complex than is the case with pint-size Bruckner.

The compacted, compressed miniaturism of Webern and of Schoenberg's Op 16 can sometimes feel intriguingly at odds with the forces used to express them: massed orchestral ranks comparable to those deployed by Mahler. And hearing the material of Op 16 and the *Accompaniment to a Cinematographic Scene* reduced to a chamber theatre-orchestra size actually makes lots of sense. The opening movement of the *Five Orchestral Pieces*, 'Vorgef  hle', borrows the immediacy of a circus band or cabaret ensemble, while the fretwork of colours supporting the single line weaving through 'Farben' has the clarity of light refracted through diamonds. Moreover, Webern's Op 6 (Guittart's revised version of the composer's own reduction) manages to take on an identity separate from the orchestral original – the only accommodation of scale needed coming with the roaring percussion climax to the fourth piece, which is reined in to avoid overwhelming the proportions.

Marianne Pousseur's 1997 recording of *Pierrot lunaire* under Philippe Herreweghe (Harmonia Mundi, 8/92) was a disappointing flop, Herreweghe's listless accompaniment rubbing awkwardly against

Pousseur's expressive oversell. But Pousseur has certainly grown into the part. Surrounded by Guittart's well-rounded and opulently detailed ensemble, now she paints a satisfyingly ghoulish canvas, with a perfectly poised *Sprechstimme* style that actually attempts to rationalise Schoenberg's pitches. **Philip Clark**

Schubert

String Quintet, D956 (arr Prooijen)

Amsterdam Sinfonietta Soloists

Channel Classics (C) (D) CCSSA36215
(53' • DDD/DSD)



Do you want a recording of Schubert's miraculous chamber swansong with a double bass taking the second cello part? That's the first question you have to ask. In fact, the bass player is none other than Rick Stotijn, and the Amsterdam Sinfonietta have proved their brilliance time after time, so purely on its own terms this performance is a bit of a winner. And the ensemble's biography in the booklet makes a slightly convoluted case for the exercise: Dragonetti was the bassist par

excellence in those days and prompted George Onslow to provide alternative bass parts for the second cello in his quintets, which Schubert may well have known. So the ensemble commissioned this arrangement from Marijn van Prooijen, himself a bass player.

Stotijn, we are told, plays a small double bass with a high tuning in fourths and a top C string. The bass adds an extra gravitas, and Stotijn's playing is so reactive that the work seems borne aloft, reminding one of the earlier *Trout* Quintet in places. And that wondrous second subject in the first movement – the cello duet with the viola providing the *bassetto*? Stotijn plays it at the original pitch. If you didn't know, you'd easily mistake it for the real thing.

The performance itself is everything you'd expect of these players. Tempi seem apt and perhaps it's only the filigree violin-work in the finale that seems slightly to evade the fingers. You'll most likely have your favourite Schubert Quintet recording already; among recent groups who offer near-ideal recordings are the Belcea (EMI, 12/09) and Pavel Haas (Supraphon, 10/13) quartets with their guest cellists. So you simply have to ask yourself whether you want a fine recording with double bass.

David Thresher

Shostakovich · Stravinsky · Braga

Braga La serenata (transcr Shostakovich)^a

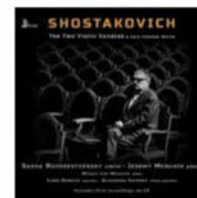
Shostakovich Violin Sonata, Op 134^b. Unfinished Violin Sonata^b. String Quartet No 4, Op 83 – Andantino (arr Tsyganov)^b Stravinsky Symphony of Psalms (arr Shostakovich)^c

^aIlona Domnich sop ^aAlexandra Sherman mez

^{ab}Sasha Rozhdestvensky vn ^bJeremy Menuhin,

^cMookie Menuhin pf

First Hand (C) FHR37 (70' • DDD)



A second 'first' recording of Shostakovich's unfinished Violin

Sonata of 1945? The explanation is that Sasha Rozhdestvensky and Jeremy Menuhin were in the studio on January 8 and 9, 2015, while Linus Roth and José Gallardo followed a fortnight later, each pair unbeknown to the other. Then the Challenge Classics disc came out a couple of months before this new one from First Hand Records.

Rozhdestvensky and Menuhin take a more flowing tempo, certainly closer to my idea of the score's *Moderato con moto*, and they are more warmly recorded. A few bars not

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available to Roth and Gallardo at the time are added, and a little tailpiece added by the violinist's famous father, Gennady, brings the movement to an artificially rounded conclusion (one likely reason that Shostakovich abandoned the project is that it was shaping up to be over-long).

The Sonata Shostakovich did complete (in 1968) is one of his finest yet also most forbidding creations. Rozhdestvensky and Menuhin are alive to the elusive principal characters of its three movements – respectively watchful, strenuous and increasingly maddened yet implacably disciplined. There have been interpretations that cover a wider emotional gamut but this one is still distinguished and moving.

The remainder of the disc will be familiar only to those who have collected Shostakovich rarities on LP. The *Symphony of Psalms* transcription, made around 1930, was initially for Shostakovich's private study and later for the instruction of his pupils; efficient and functional, it invites the unfussy but scrupulously prepared playing it receives here. Tsyganov's transcription of the *Andantino* from the Fourth Quartet is a pleasing but inconsequential exercise. The Braga Serenade, transcribed in 1972 in connection with plans for an opera on Chekhov's *The Black Monk* that otherwise never got past the libretto stage, should really be sung much more delicately than it is here. But that detracts little from a disc that should be of outstanding interest to Shostakovich lovers. **David Fanning**

Unfinished Sonata – comparative version:
Roth, Gallardo (9/15) (CHAL) CC72680

'American Works for Cello and Piano'

Barber Cello Sonata, Op 6 **Bernstein** Three Meditations from Mass **Carter** Cello Sonata **Copland** Billy the Kid – Waltz and Celebration **Crumb** Solo Cello Sonata
Paul Watkins vc **Huw Watkins** pf
Chandos © CHAN10881 (69' • DDD)



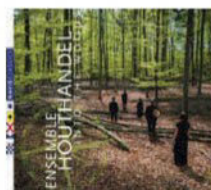
Here are the big names of 20th-century American music from an unfamiliar angle, and it's all wonderfully played. Barber's early Sonata (1932) was dedicated to his conservative Italian teacher who admired Brahms, and it shows: the work could almost be called Brahms's Third. This spectacular performance confirms its status as a standard classic, if not as personal as later Barber.

Carter's Sonata (1948) heralds his demanding later style. It starts with a *staccato* piano part, which Carter described as 'like a clock ticking', and the writing soon gets densely energetic for both players. The second movement, a kind of syncopated *scherzo*, has vestiges of Carter's earlier style in pieces like the *Holiday Overture*. There's an eloquent slow movement and a hyperactive finale ending with the ticking clock in the cello.

Crumb's little-known early Sonata for solo cello (1955) has few of the characteristics of the mature composer we hear in such pieces as the *Makrokosmos* group. Written for his mother, a cellist, it has an attractive second movement in siciliano rhythm and is a fine vehicle for Paul Watkins. The rest of the CD contains arrangements made by the composers. The Bernstein *Meditations* stem from interludes in his *Mass*. The second, based on the weird chromatic sequence in the finale of Beethoven's *Choral* Symphony, is strikingly intense but the varied metres of the last are familiar, with hymn-like slow passages. Here Huw Watkins uses a bongo instead of hacking his fingers tapping on the piano lid. The two popular numbers from *Billy the Kid* are inimitable Copland fun. This is a winning collection: excellent recording, magnificent cello, and all we need in Mervyn Cooke's notes. **Peter Dickinson**

'Into the Woods'

Arnold Three Shanties **Barber** Summer Music, Op 31 **Bernstein** *Candide* – Overture (transc Don Stewart) **Gershwin** *Porgy and Bess* – selections (transc Bill Holcombe)
Muczynski Quintet for Winds, Op 45
Ensemble Houthandel
Navis © NC15006 (54' • DDD)



Briefly subverting 'What shall we do with the drunken sailor?' into a tango has to be a Good Thing in my book, which is precisely what Malcolm Arnold does in the first of his *Three Shanties*. They form the sole British contribution to a disc of Anglo-Saxon wind quintet repertoire from the Antwerp-based Ensemble Houthandel. There is a feeling of summer and the great outdoors to the disc's repertoire, which is lilting and light-hearted by turns. Arnold's Shanties rollick along infectiously, while Leonard Bernstein's effervescent Overture to *Candide* takes well to its wind-quintet clothing, a little oboe queasiness apart.

Chicago-born Robert Muczynski's Quintet for Winds is a short, good-natured

work, an ebullient *Allegro risoluto* giving way to a lyrical *Andante*. Sarah Vermeyen finds a wonderful breathy quality for the flute exchanges in the more substantial third movement, which ends in a high-spirited romp to the finish line.

In more familiar repertoire, Barber's *Summer Music* opens expansively here, but there's admirably crisp articulation in the agitated middle section. A different American 'Summertime' appears in lengthy excerpts (18 minutes' worth) from *Porgy and Bess*. Initially lacking in weight and (obviously) minus the text, Bill Holcombe's arrangement occasionally drifts into blandness, but Gershwin's toe-tapping tunes won me round.

In an entertaining booklet-note, the ensemble state that their aim is 'to amuse, surprise and fascinate'. On that basis alone, this disc is a considerable success.

Mark Pullinger

'Minoritenkonvent'

Sonatas from the Manuscript XIV 726 by **Biber**, **Faber**, **Teubner**, **Viviani**, **Volta** and **Anonymous**
Aliquando
Muso © MU008 (73' • DDD)



Today Biber is probably the best known of the mid- to late-17th-century violin virtuoso composers, but this stylish recording offers a glimpse of the environment within which he worked. It draws from a huge collection of music preserved in a single manuscript, housed today in the library of the Minorite convent in Vienna (hence the disc's title). Of its dozens of sonatas, some are ascribed to named composers, but several of the anonymous works have clear links to Habsburg court culture.

Aliquando is a French ensemble, two of whose members appear here as a duo. Violinist Stéphanie Paulet's technique is fluent, restrained yet fleet of foot and unerringly stylish, capable of sustained, extended discourse whether her subject is a long pedal-point (such as the one that opens the disc) or a six-minute passacaglia (the anonymous No 75).

The strongly church-oriented context for this solo violin repertory justifies the use of the organ as the sole continuo instrument. Elisabeth Geiger presides over a chamber organ that is worth hearing for its sake alone, the only surviving positive by André Silbermann (mentor and elder brother of the legendary Gottfried Silbermann). Built in the 1720s and recently restored, it combines the



Violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja with Jorge Sanchez-Chiong on turntables, one of the several artists she duets with on her new Alpha disc

intimacy and quick action of a chamber instrument with sufficient power to fill an acoustic. It's a wonderful instrument, discrete yet full of character, and it sports several show-stopping registers that Geiger introduces with real flair. Combined with the occasional use of *scordatura* on the violin, this lends a distinct character to each of the sonatas chosen for this recording. This is chamber musicianship of a high order.

The accompanying booklet has an excellent set of essays detailing various aspects of the recording, not least full notes on the Silberman organ, which is also beautifully photographed. Another of my year's highlights, beyond doubt. **Fabrice Fitch**

'Take Two'

Anonymous Alleluia (Winchester Troper)
JS Bach Solo Violin Partita No 2, BWV1004 – Chaconne **Biber** Sonata *representativa* **Cage** Melody No 4 **L Dick** The Grasshopper and the Ant **Falla** Suite *populaire espagnole* – Jota; Nana; Polo **Giamberti** CuCu **Gibbons** Fantasy No 4 **Holliger** A Little Something (A Small Story by Alice). Spring Dance (Unsteady). Tröpfli-Musig **Machaut** Balade No 4, 'Biauté qui' **Martinů** Rhythmic Etudes – With Rests **Milhaud** Suite, Op 157b – Jeu (Vif) **Sanchez-Chiong** Overclockers I-V **Sotelo** Cuatro Fragmentos de luz **Vivier** Pièce **Zykan** Das mit der Stimme

Patricia Kopatchinskaja vn/voc with **Ernesto Estrella** voc **Reto Bieri** cl/vn/ocarina **Laurence Dreyfus** treble viol **Matthias Würsch** darbuka **Pablo Marquez** gtr **Anthony Romaniuk** hpd/toy pf **Jorge Sanchez-Chiong** elecs/turntables
 Alpha © ALPHA211 (77' • DDD)



The Moldovan violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja doesn't toe the line. Her performances of core repertoire are emotionally supercharged: some listeners balk at the extremities, while others (myself included) tend to be enthralled by the energy. She plays barefoot, often dressed the part in folk costume for Bartók or androgynous trouser suits for Tchaikovsky. Regardless of whether a specific interpretation works or doesn't, there's no doubting her capacity to jolt an audience into engaging with the repertoire afresh.

That ballsy stage persona resonates everywhere in her new duo album. 'With this piece we want to clean our ears,' she writes of the opening track, Jorge Sanchez-Chiong's raucous *Overclockers V*, in booklet-notes that take the form of a verbatim conversation with her seven-year-old

daughter. The concept might seem contrived from anyone else. The album contains 24 short duets with sparring partners including clarinetist Reto Bieri, violist Laurence Dreyfus and guitarist Pablo Marquez. Repertoire roams Claude Vivier's vivid, strangely mournful *Pièce* for violin and clarinet to John Cage's hotly lyrical *Melody No 4*; from Giamberti's *CuCu* (with ocarina) to Biber's *Sonata representativa* via Holliger, Martinu, Falla, Milhaud and more. It's quite the taster pack of violin sonorities; if only every seven-year-old had a musical induction that paid so little attention to conventional genre boundaries.

Kopatchinskaja's performances are gripping. She plays, sings, narrates and laughs with fierce commitment and unbound, hot-blooded expression. Only the final track didn't work for me: a spiky, restive account of the Chaconne from Bach's D minor Partita with Anthony Romaniuk adding busy harpsichord improvisations. It's impassioned playing but cluttered and hectic. Elsewhere there are moments of real stripped-back simplicity: an absorbingly still, pliant account of an 11th-century *Alleluia* from the Winchester Troper, for example, or the husky, introverted swing of 'Nana' from Falla's *Suite populaire espagnole*. **Kate Molleson**

Sherrill Milnes

In the year of the great American Verdi baritone's 80th birthday, James Inverne pays tribute

Perhaps more than any other in the acknowledged 'royal line' of American Verdi baritones (Lawrence Tibbett, Leonard Warren, Robert Merrill and Cornell MacNeil), Sherrill Milnes is the image of the all-American star.

He grew up on a farm in Illinois, where he got to know his voice by singing to the cows in the barns – and learnt his work ethic from having to milk 20 of them at a time. Vocally, too, he epitomised the American sound, with a voice that was

broad and powerful, rolling out from his barrel chest with seeming ease and pouring over even the largest orchestras. Yet Milnes – who turned 80 in January and celebrates the 50th

anniversary of his Met debut this month – had something the others didn't. With all the power, there was a rich, velvety quality that allowed him a more rarefied range of vocal colours than his peers; he could personify nobility or, with a subtle darkening, nobility perverted.

This, of course, was perfect for his beloved Verdi, whose baritones tend to be either heroes, fallen heroes or uncompromisingly, anti-heroically evil. And not only

could Milnes be relied upon, night after night at the Met, to produce his incredible stream of glorious sound, but also there seemed no end to his upper range. He knew it, and he made sure that audiences knew it. Sometimes complaining that Verdi gave his tenors the high notes, he was not above the odd unwritten, unlikely high-wire act. Plácido Domingo has written of a *La traviata* at the Hollywood Bowl where a frustrated Milnes asked conductor James Levine if he might take the usual high option to end Germont's Act 2 cabaletta. The answer was a stern no, so Milnes, unchastened, instead reached even higher, for an astounding high B flat (check it out on YouTube).

Such abandon had its price, and Milnes's voice began to wear relatively early. Not for

him the prolonged Indian summer of Falstaffs and *buffa* roles usually afforded to ageing Verdi baritones; his was a star that burned brightly – brightest of all; and in his latter years he has returned to his early love, teaching.

Yet Milnes was always a singer who knew who he was and what he was put on this earth for. His discography, enormous at more than 50 recordings of mostly complete operas, is remarkably well defined – consisting almost entirely of

works by Verdi or other Italian fare. His prime coincided with a stable of great stars at ease in that demanding repertoire, and it was either to Milnes or to his Italian rival Piero Cappuccilli

that the studios usually turned when looking for a match with, variously, Domingo, Pavarotti, Mirella Freni, Leontyne Price and Montserrat Caballé.

In every single one of those recordings you know what you will get with Milnes. That magnificent voice is always present, always at its best (he refused to allow first takes, to give the colours time to emerge) and always wielded with

a swagger that ensures no colleague steals the spotlight. Which is not to say that he doesn't find depth – this best comes from the roles where he can intertwine the characterisation with the voice's innate characteristics, as with his unsurpassed Macbeth, whereby the listener can almost hear the character's spirit decay as the shades fall across his voice (just listen to the tortured layering of textures after Macbeth kills Duncan in 'Tutto è finito!' on the EMI recording under Muti).

Outside the Italian repertoire, his Jokanaan for Leinsdorf's grievously underrated *Salome* recording (RCA) also pumps charisma. Those 'Du bist verflucht!' curses wallop you between the eyes – yet contrast with the sudden ardour he finds when trying to turn Salome to God. Incidentally, in case Milnes's stardom should ever

He could personify nobility or, with a subtle darkening, nobility perverted – perfect for Verdi's baritone roles

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1960 – *Professional debut*

Professional debut as Masetto, following which he joins the Boris Goldovsky Opera Company, with which he gains invaluable, intensive experience, travelling more than 100,000 miles and singing in more than 300 performances

• 1965 – *Joint Met debut with Caballé*

December Met Opera debut as Valentin in Gounod's *Faust*. The same night features the debut of Montserrat Caballé, already famous in Europe, whose presence guarantees that every newspaper reviewer is there – quite a break for the baritone

• 1970 – *European debut*

European opera house debut at the Vienna State Opera in *Macbeth*. Milnes later points to this as the moment he feels he has 'arrived', as 'Americans are taught to believe everything is better in Europe' (an unofficial recording of the occasion, available on the Opera d'Oro label, reveals an electric performance under Karl Böhm)

• 1977 – *Presidential engagement*

Sings at the service for President Carter's inauguration, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial – the first of several such important occasions at which he performs (one later outdoor concert, also in Washington DC, draws an audience of more than half a million)

• 2001 – *Singer turns nurturer*

Co-founds the VOICEperience Foundation to train young singers, pointing the way forward for his career today as nurturer of young talent



Sherill Milnes as Sheriff Jack Rance in Puccini's *La fanciulla del West* – a role he recorded twice for DG

be confused with any sense of preciousness, that recording – made at Walthamstow Assembly Hall in 1968 – involved the singer gamely performing in the kitchen while kneeling precariously atop a large commercial oven with his head up the extractor fan, doors all open leading to the studio, to get the desired underground effect!

There is the odd recorded anomaly – a jaunty collection of light songs with Beverly Sills; a curious but rather compelling *Monna Vanna* (Rachmaninov's unfinished opera) for Chandos. But he stuck close to his beloved Verdi, and recording after recording are among the best available – *Il trovatore* (conducted by Mehta, on RCA), *Attila* (Gardelli, Decca), *Otello* (Levine, RCA), the Muti *Macbeth*, *Rigoletto*

(Bonyngue, Decca), *La forza del destino* and *Andrea Chénier* (both Levine, RCA), *La gioconda* (Bartoletti, Decca) and *La fanciulla del West* (DG, Mehta: a *Gramophone* Award winner).

In some ways, perhaps the greatest testament to Milnes's art is a late recording, a filmed 1984 performance of *Simon Boccanegra* (Levine, DG). By this time, his voice had

lost much of its glamorous sheen, that luxurious opening out was no longer to be counted on. So here is Milnes naked, as it were. And he finds instead a deep humanity in the role that is unforgettable – his plea for peace is not the command of the charismatic star, but the profound understanding of a man who has lived, who feels innately the yearnings of this music. And that is the mark of a truly great artist. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Verdi: *Macbeth*

Ambrosian Opera Chorus, New Philharmonia Orchestra / Riccardo Muti
EMI ⓑ ② 319270-2 (12/76^R, 5/89^R)

With fond glances to his *Otello*, *La fanciulla del West*, *Don Carlo*, *Lucia di Lammermoor* and many more, Milnes's defining role and finest recording is *Macbeth*. With

a conductor who mines a glinting darkness in the score which matches his leading man's timbre, a brilliantly intelligent Lady *Macbeth* in Fiorenza Cossotto and an on-fire Milnes, there's simply no other *Macbeth* in the catalogue to match this recording.

Instrumental



Guy Rickards on a comprehensive set of Enescu's piano works :

'Stirbat is a virtuoso interpreter, as can be heard in some of the Chopinesque early pieces, such as the Barcarolle' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 75**



Jed Distler explores a new disc of 20th-century harpsichord music:

'Kudos to Lewis for exploring a fascinating corner of 20th-century harpsichord history in the right way' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 77**

JS Bach

Solo Violin Sonatas and Partitas, BWV1001-1006

Midori *vi*

Onyx ® ② ONYX4123 (136' • DDD)



A frustrating issue. Midori's careful and polished addition to the extensive catalogue

of recordings of Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin should in many ways be one to buy with impunity. Certainly, the tone that underpins the faultless tuning is beautifully clear, added to which she brings an appealing 'woodiness' to her sound that is almost vocal in quality. Every note is meticulously placed, too – fitting easily into the musical structure that immediately surrounds it. Yet there is so much pulling about of the tempi and disconcerting reversal of arpeggios that one can struggle to follow any of the melodies that should be apparent at any given moment. This in turn ultimately undermines the grander structure of the pieces – and the collection as a whole – and creates a performance that is largely concentrated on only one element at any one time.

Sometimes the pulse is perfect, with a strong sense of the dance that should be in every movement (the Preludio of the E major Partita). Or the tempo is exactly right (the Fuga of the Sonata in G minor, for example). Or there is a strong sense of where the harmony is going (as in the Adagio of the Sonata in C major). But never do all three of those elements come together at the same time to allow the power in this music to be unleashed.

Take the mighty Chaconne of the D minor Partita (the litmus test for any recording): here the performance is particularly perplexing. There is little sense of the constant pulse of triple time – making it a Sarabande in all but name – that runs through it. As a product of Midori's *rubato*, rather than the note values that Bach wrote into the music, the tempi are constantly ebbing and flowing. The result is that the

music is somewhat under siege rather than subject to the sort of non-prescriptive interpretation that will allow the listener to find his or her own way through it.

A couple of considerable slips that border on mistakes (in particular some uncontrolled skipping over the strings at the end of the Fuga of the Sonata in G minor) indicate long takes that have been left to stand due to their evident musical integrity. They stitch a warmth and humanity on to the surface of a performance that otherwise displays a certain untouchable beauty and hauteur. Although its recommendations on paper are manifold, to go straight from this to the elegant, warm recordings of Isabelle Faust or Christoph Poppen's fleetness and raw vibrancy is to apprehend immediately how much that type of musical aloofness can create a barrier between listener and music.

Caroline Gill

Sonatas & Partitas – selected comparison:

Faust (6/10, 11/12) (HARM)

HMC90 2059 & HMC90 2124

Partita No 2 – selected comparison:

Poppen (11/01) (ECM) 461 895-2

Beethoven

Piano Sonatas – No 9, Op 14 No 1; No 10, Op 14 No 2; No 11, Op 22; No 12, Op 26; No 13, 'quasi una fantasia', Op 27 No 1; No 14, 'Moonlight', Op 27 No 2; No 15, 'Pastoral', Op 28; No 19, Op 49 No 1; No 20, Op 49 No 2

Paavali Jumppanen *pf*

Onidne ® ② ODE1280-2D (144' • DDD)



Paavali Jumppanen's latest double-CD release proves the most consistently engaging so far in his Beethoven sonata cycle. The rhythmically astute yet flexible fingerwork, lean yet well-modulated sonority and stylish intelligence that I praised in Jumppanen's Op 10 sonatas on Vol 2 (6/15) extend to the little Op 14 pair introducing this third volume. The G major sonata (No 10), in particular,

stands out for Jumppanen's caustic demeanour and stinging *fortes* in the central movement's detached chords and for his playfully angular delineation of the finale's upward scales. By pushing certain passages slightly ahead of the beat, Jumppanen underlines the Op 22 *Allegro con brio*'s implicit *opera buffa* qualities, while his avoidance of all things foursquare in the two 'easy' Op 49 sonatas evokes Artur Schnabel's 'sophisticated simplicity'. Add astute voice-leading to Richter's winged fingerwork in the Op 26 *Scherzo* and toccata-like finale and you get the essence of Jumppanen's bracingly clear reading.

His invigorating Op 27 No 1 lives up to the work's *quasi una fantasia* subtitle. The *Allegro* following the opening *Andante* hits you like an unexpected cyclone. The *Scherzo* is a tad contained to scamper irreverently, yet strategic accents and *crescendos* keep the music on edge. Unlike the many *Moonlight Sonata Adagios* that swoon over the famous right-hand melody, Jumppanen's zeroes in on bass-lines, and he brings a refreshingly insistent groove to the arpeggios. In this context, I expected a less sedate *Allegretto*, along with more perceptible *agitato* in the *Presto* finale.

Because Jumppanen shapes the *Pastoral* Sonata's first movement's accompaniment with lots of colour and tonal heft, I'm surprised that he underplays the *Andante*'s woodwind-like writing. At the same time, the *Scherzo* paradoxically fuses controlled calibration and nervous energy.

Jumppanen's command of voice-leading and textural differentiation in the Rondo finale is akin to a three-dimensional chess master, even if the difficult final pages are more of a knockout punch than a decisive checkmate. The pianist's insightful booklet-notes add value to this largely compelling release, as does Onidne's immaculate sound. **Jed Distler**

Chopin

55 Mazurkas

Dmitri Alexeev *pf*

Fryderyk Chopin Institute ® ② NIFCCD204/5 (145' • DDD)



Paavali Jumppanen: stylish intelligence in the latest instalment of his Beethoven survey on Ondine



In a recently posted internet interview, Russian-born Dmitri Alexeev discusses his role as a juror of the Chopin Competition and speaks about the Mazurkas. 'In these pieces,' he says, and I paraphrase, 'nationality is important but perhaps doesn't have the last word. The Mazurkas speak of something very important for every human being.' The straightforward simplicity that informs these vivid interpretations is one of the keys to their clarity and freshness.

Though Chopin said that his mazurkas were 'not for dancing', Alexeev's tempi are everywhere so apt, his kinaesthetic sense so unerring, that it is almost impossible not to imagine them danced. Here a stamping dance, there a circling dance, here the men click their boots, there ladies weave in and out in an elegant sash dance. A delightful playfulness erupts from time to time.

Alexeev has the uncanny ability of discerning each mazurka's unique character and individual utterance. This lends his interpretations a stunning variety. I can testify that listening to the roughly 145 minutes of 3/4 time at a single sitting is not only possible but highly enjoyable.

Immaculate phrasing is an integral part of these finely wrought performances, but for me Alexeev's handling of Chopin's intricate voice-leading and idiosyncratic harmonies is most impressive. Savour, for instance, the poignant piquancy of Op 17 No 2, the delicately poised coquetry of Op 33 No 3, the virile high spirits of Op 41 No 2 or the aching tragedy implicit in Op 50 No 3. The depth and subtlety of these consummately artistic readings means that their full dimension becomes apparent only after repeated listening.

The mazurkas are presented in more or less chronological order and handsomely packaged. Notes on the music are contributed by the inimitable Jim Samson, with an essay by Jan Henrik-Amberg providing a veritable reception history of the mazurkas, as well as documenting the more than 50 complete recordings that have appeared in the past three-quarters of a century. Alexeev's set will confidently take its place among the best of these, alongside those of Rubinstein, Halina Czerny-Stefańska and Yakov Flier. It may in fact become your favourite of all, as it has mine. **Patrick Rucker**

Debussy

Préludes, Books 1 & 2

Francesco Piemontesi *pf*

Naïve © V5415 (81' • DDD)

Debussy

Préludes, Book 2. Suite bergamasque

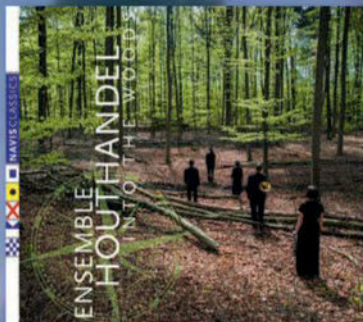
Marita Viitasalo *pf*

Ondine © ODE1269-2 (61' • DDD)



Francesco Piemontesi, who numbers Brendel, Perahia, Weissenberg and Ousset among his teachers, offers a masterly account of Debussy's *Préludes*. Yet this is both a virtue and a limitation. His ultra-modern reaction to an earlier tradition exemplified by Gieseking replaces half-lights and tonal opalescence – and it has to be said approximation – with an unfaltering and imperious command. He has, in this sense, imbibed much of Ousset's force and clarity, if also her literalism. Bold and dramatic, he excels in the more extrovert preludes ('Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest', which is truly *tumultueux*, and 'Feux d'artifice', all soaring rockets and Bengal lights).

But there is too little mystery and confidentiality in those preludes where Debussy demands stillness rather than hyperactivity, a touch of mystery and enigma rather than exultance. The opening of 'Voiles' is more assertive than *piano* and ►



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GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

EGON PETRI TRANSFERRED

Jeremy Nicholas listens to the latest reincarnation of the collected recordings of the Dutch pianist, 1929-51



Egon Petri: 'piano-playing raised to spectacular and impassioned heights'

For those who have not encountered Egon Petri previously, he was Dutch (though born in Hanover) and lived from 1881 to 1962. Busoni, a family friend, was the greatest musical influence on his life in a friendship that endured for 38 years. Young Egon began his dual career as a soloist and pedagogue in Manchester before moving to Berlin and then Poland. When the Germans invaded he fled to America, eventually taking US citizenship. After a heart attack in 1946, he abandoned the concert stage for a teaching post in California.

Although considered one of the foremost pianists of his day, Petri never achieved the celebrity status of some of his peers. Perhaps it was his unwillingness to embrace the virtuoso's lifestyle and his reluctance to travel; maybe, with his modest stage demeanour and distaste for any extraneous gestures, audiences felt he lacked charisma. He looked more like a sober-suited bank manager than a concert pianist. These recordings completely belie his appearance, for among them you will hear piano-playing raised to spectacular and impassioned heights, and a tonal palette that was as varied in its colours as it was subtly and tastefully applied. Petri disliked the recording process (like many others) but you would never guess so from the daring, unbuttoned pianist frequently on show here.

Petri's complete Electrola, English Columbia and American Columbia solo and concerto recordings from 1929 to

1942 were issued on three two-CD sets by APR over 20 years ago. Then the music was ordered into genre ('The later Liszt transcription recordings', 'The complete Busoni recordings', etc). Now in a more compact format and the familiar APR livery of recent years, the recordings are presented in roughly chronological order and with the significant additions of the recordings Petri made for American Columbia between 1943 and 1951. From 1945 come a Bach-Busoni Chaconne, somewhat compromised by the dry acoustic, and Beethoven's Piano Sonata in F, Op 10 No 2, in far more appealing sound (though recorded on the same day). From four days later come a Petri favourite, Liszt's transcription of Beethoven's 'Adelaide', and, previously unissued in any format, Brahms's Four Ballades, Op 10 (not the recording he made later for the Allegro label). Also from these sessions and issued for the first time are the Six Pieces, Op 118. Here is Brahms from a pianist who met the composer, intimately set, lucidly voiced and lightly pedalled, Petri's resonant tone heard elsewhere somewhat confined by the studio acoustic, but no matter.

There were no more recordings for this label until 1951 – and then an avalanche: the *Hammerklavier* on March 14, a commanding and properly monumental reading to live with; two days later came six Schubert-Liszt song transcriptions and *Soirée de Vienne* No 6, and the following day the Schubert-Tausig Andantino and Variations, all repeats of titles he had made

in the 78rpm era with the exception of an astonishing account of 'Erlkönig'. As Mark Ainley observes in his notes, 'listening to those octaves, one would never guess that [Petri] was already 70 at the time of this recording'.

Indeed, time and again it is Petri's astounding technique that causes one to stop in wonder. In that respect, there are treats aplenty in store. Disc 1 opens with six titles recorded on September 17, 1929, which include Liszt's *Paganini* Etude No 5 given in Busoni's rarely heard version and one of the most dazzling accounts of *Gnomenreigen* on disc, quite the equal of Simon Barere in control and finesse. Disc 2 opens with a *Moonlight* Sonata notable for the fast tempo of the first movement, which has the effect of making the succeeding movements follow one another quite logically rather than as the three standalone movements one often hears.

There are times – some of the Chopin-playing, for instance – when you wish Petri would unbend a little more and be less matter-of-fact, but in Liszt's *Rigoletto* Paraphrase (1937) and *Faust* Waltz (1936, played with Busoni's cadenza) you are listening to one of the supreme Liszt pianists of the era. Where others labour in some of the scale- and passagework, Petri uses it as an aside, as mere punctuation, to breathtaking effect. *Un sospiro* and *Ricordanza* (both from 1937) offer miracles of pianistic refinement. Among other highlights are three Beethoven sonatas, Opp 78, 90 and 111, recorded in 1935 and '36, and the eight Busoni titles set down shortly afterwards (they include a superlative reading of the *Sonatina super Carmen*); it has been said that in the Brahms *Paganini* Variations only Michelangeli is Petri's true competitor. Few would disagree. A final highlight is one of the four works here with piano and orchestra – there's a so-so Tchaikovsky First with Walter Goehr, a fine Liszt Second and Fantasia on *The Ruins of Athens* (a rarity on disc) with Leslie Heward – in the form of a simply spine-tingling Liszt-Busoni *Rapsodie espagnole* under Mitropoulos, a fellow pupil of Busoni, with the Minneapolis SO.

Mark Obert-Thorn's audio restoration has achieved remarkably uniform results and APR's annotation and presentation are, as always, the standard for the industry. **G**



THE RECORDING

Various Cpsrs Cpte Columbia and Electrola Solo and Concerto recordings 1929-1951

Egon Petri *pf*

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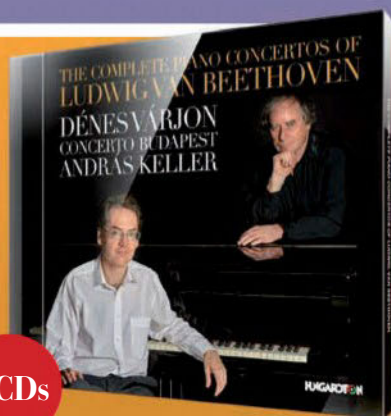
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très doux, hardly evoking the ever-fanciful Cortot's 'flight of the white wing on the crooning sea'. 'Puck' has put on weight since we last met him, and why so fast (it is marked *modérée*) in the near-bitonal mists of 'Brouillards'? Again, 'Bruyères' is fast and casual, with too little sense of heathland and the smell of heather. There is greater gentleness in 'La fille au cheveux de lin', some measure of desolation in 'Des pas sur la neige', and 'Minstrels' is a dazzling success, truly *nerveux et avec humour*. But, more generally, you are made more aware of the virtuoso than the poet.

Per contra, Marita Viitasalo, who gives us the second book of *Préludes* (she recorded the first for Ondine almost 30 years ago), is more restrained, less inclined to inflate delicacy and reflection into concert-study proportions. But her caution in the whirling abstraction of 'Les tierces alternées' exposes technical limitations and her lethargy in those *Préludes* calling for fleetness ('Puck' and 'Ondine') erases much sense of character. 'Hommage à S Pickwick Esq' – an affectionate dig at British pomposity – is insufficiently deft or robust, and Viitasalo's coupling of the *Suite bergamasque* is hardly more successful, with too little vivacity (try the Menuet) and quickness of response.

Piemontesi, whose disc is dedicated to Ousset, is opulently recorded, a faithful mirror of his magisterial approach. His is very much a personal taste, offering too little competition for Gieseking (EMI), who still exerts his old magic, for Zimerman and, in Book 2, for Marc-André Hamelin. **Bryce Morrison**

Préludes – selected comparison:

Zimerman (3/94) (DG) 435 773-2GH2

Préludes, Book 2 – selected comparison:

Hamelin (11/14) (HYPE) CDA67920

Enescu

'Complete Works for Piano Solo'

Raluca Stirbat *pf*

Hänssler Classic (M) (3) CD98 060 (3h 21' • DDD)



Luiza Borac reset the bar in Enescu's solo piano music in her survey (2003-05),

overtaking Aurora Ienei (Electrecord/Olympia – nla) and Cristian Petrescu (Accord – nla), impressing with the greater fluidity and dynamism of her playing, caught in Avie's far superior sound. Despite some impressive individual issues, such as by Meecham (Somm, 1/09) and Varga (Naxos), Borac – whose survey made no claim to completeness – went unchallenged, until now. Her compatriot Raluca Stirbat has set

down a very impressive rival collection, adding some additional early pieces omitted by Borac, such as the Prelude that formed a Diptych with the Scherzo in F sharp minor (1896), the Barcarolle, *La Fileuse* (both 1897), two Impromptus (1898, 1900), *Regrets* (1898) and the original (1912) and very different version of the 1924 First Sonata's opening movement, several issued here for the first time.

Stirbat's recordings of the Second and Third Suites are recycled from an earlier Gramola release. Sonata No 1 (1924) – which she has also recorded before for Gramola – is new, Stirbat's tempi in this later interpretation a touch more measured, taking a minute longer. While lagging noticeably behind Borac in the central *Presto vivace*, Stirbat takes the concluding *Andante molto espressivo* rather more at the walk than her rival's more *molto espressivo* amble – a difference of 90 seconds, or one-sixth of the playing time. (Varga on Naxos is in between, perhaps closer to Borac but not so involving; all are outpaced in the first movement by Rangell on Bridge Records, but at nine minutes he is slowest in the finale.)

The First Sonata is typical as a comparison. Overall, Borac's playing has the greater subtlety and fluency, with Stirbat – hampered by occasionally hard sound that makes her instrument sound clattery – stiffer and harder-edged. Listen to Suite No 2's Wagnerian opening or the delicate textures of 'Carillon Nocturne' in *Pièces impromptues* to hear how Borac gets closer to Enescu's essence. Yet Stirbat is no less virtuoso an interpreter, as can be heard in some of the Chopinesque early pieces. Overall, her views of the works are sufficiently different to make hers a highly recommendable alternative set, but Borac's remains first choice. **Guy Rickards**

Piano works – selected comparison:

Borac (11/03, 6/06) (AVIE) AV0013, AV2081 (oas)

Feldman

For Bunita Marcus

Ivan Ilić *pf*

Paraty (P) PARATY135305 (68' • DDD)



There's a neat Cornelius Cardew quote about how best to approach the works of Morton Feldman: 'Almost all Feldman's music is slow and soft...Only when one has become accustomed to the dimness of light can one begin to perceive the richness and variety of colour.' This disc from Paris-based Serbian-American pianist Ivan Ilić

taps into the richness and the variety, and adds something of his own inquisitive voice. It is Ilić's third Feldman disc, and for me it's his most spacious and searching yet.

Feldman's 70-minute solo piano piece was written in 1985 for the composer Bunita Marcus, a favourite student, companion and sometime lover. Feldman would later acknowledge that it was also a work about the death of his mother, 'and the whole idea of someone lingering on. I just didn't want the piece to die.' The flow of time is crucial: that ability to send us drifting – to suspend our sense of real time for over an hour – while simultaneously drawing in our attention to the bloom and decay of each individual note. Ilić clinches the balance with a quiet, urgent focus and a delicate touch. The music is stark and introverted, and gently mournful, but in Ilić's hands it is also very sensual. That his debut album in 2008 of was a set of Debussy *Préludes* really shows in the soft-grained shimmer of his articulation and the flux of his rhythms.

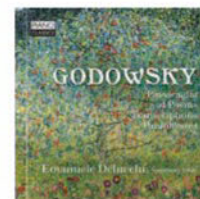
My only complaint is a nerdish technical one, to do with sound quality. The piano has been recorded up close in a way that fits with the intimacy of the music, but the sutures between edits are often audible in the acoustic. I'm being ultra fussy here, but these things matter in a piece that demands such acute attention to texture and space. **Kate Molleson**

Godowsky

Godowsky Passacaglia. Twelve Schubert Song Transcriptions – No 1, Wohin; No 2, Gute Nacht; No 7, Wiegenlied; No 8, Morgengruss; No 11, Heidenröslein. Four Poems. Symphonische Metamorphosen Johann Strauss'scher Themen – No 3, Wein, Weib und Gesang. Triakontameron – No 11, Alt Wien **Albéniz/Godowsky** España – Tango **Bizet/Godowsky** L'Arlésienne – Adagietto **Godard/Godowsky** Concerto romantique – Canzonetta **R Strauss/Godowsky** Ständchen

Emanuele Delucchi *pf*

Piano Classics (M) PCL0096 (65' • DDD)



For an entrée into the polyphonic world of Godowsky, Emanuele Delucchi's programme

could hardly be bettered – a representative, nicely varied selection, played, intriguingly, on a 1906 Steinway.

First impressions of the young Italian are promising, with the opening of the Passacaglia warmly mellow and paced at a proper *andante moderato*. Soon, however, niggles set in: dynamics and voicing are often too generalised (listen to Vars 7 and 9, for example), though Delucchi can certainly

get around the keyboard (this Passacaglia comes in at a fast-ish 15'10"). I wondered whether at times the period instrument was a help or a hindrance with tone production. At any rate, it doesn't sing like the piano on which Marc-André Hamelin recorded the Passacaglia back in 1988, and the Canadian is able to unravel Godowsky's polyphonic web with markedly more finesse.

The elaborate textures of the Schubert songs sound more like Brahms than they need to, though 'Gute Nacht' is nicely done – Delucchi has obviously benefited from studying Godowsky's own recording – as is the delicate touch he brings to the little Canzonetta from Godard's *Concerto romantique* (only its second recording). In the other transcriptions Hamelin again (Hyperion, 9/08) is more refined in 'Ständchen' (R Strauss) and sensuous in the Tango (Albéniz). The *Four Poems* invite some of the Italian's best playing, with little of the harsh tone at *forte* and above that creeps in elsewhere. The best performance on the disc is 'Wein, Weib und Gesang', showing great technical accomplishment and a relaxed, assured empathy with both Strauss and Godowsky (he takes the same cut of 56 bars in the D flat section as Shura Cherkassky, with whom the work was a great favourite). 'Alt Wien' forms a charming coda to the programme.

So, though not completely successful, a talent and programme very worthwhile investigating. Note to Piano Classics: de-mangle the English of your booklets. Your label and artists and my native language deserve better. **Jeremy Nicholas**
Passacaglia – selected comparison:
Hamelin (3/02) (HYPE) CDA67300

Schubert

'Des fragments aux étoiles'

Piano Sonata No 21, D960. Dances, D365 – No 1; No 2. Deutsche Tänze: D366 – No 3; No 4; D783 – No 5; No 10; No 14; No 15; D790 – No 3; No 5; No 11. Mélodie hongroise, D817. Valse noble, D969 No 10. Valse sentimentale, D779 No 13. Valses, D145 – No 2; No 8

Shani Diluka *pf*

Mirare © MIR240 (58' • DDD)



Shani Diluka is a pianist whose playing throws open the doors to hitherto unimagined chambers within the realm of understatement. Her new recording of Schubert, prefacing the great B flat Sonata with a curious assortment of waltzes and German dances and the *Mélodie hongroise*, is subtitled 'Des fragments aux étoiles'.

It was the critic James Huneker who first described the Chopin Waltzes as dances for the soul rather than the feet. With Schubert, however, there is evidence that he composed with the feet specifically in mind. Essentially all his dances were improvised on the spot for convivial gatherings of his friends, and the improvisations he deemed interesting would later be written down. If one imagines dancing at a Schubertiade to Diluka's selection, it must have been an extremely slow and melancholy affair, the dancers perhaps dispirited at trying to keep time against the uncharacteristic and pervasive *rubato* of these performances. One does marvel at Diluka's dynamic palette, with its range of *mezzo-forte* to the scarcely audible, and how she manages with so little.

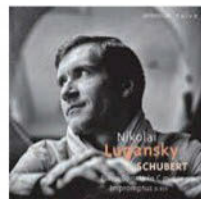
Something of the same pastel, timidly non-committal atmosphere hovers over the B flat Sonata. In fact, amid such an abundance of indecisive articulation, a point of view is difficult to discern. In lieu of Schubert's *Andante sostenuto*, Diluka opts for a glacial *largo*. In this context, the energy summoned for the concluding *Allegro ma non troppo* seems almost alarming. But even that final rush to the finish fails to cast off the aura of somnolence that enshrouds this CD. **Patrick Rucker**

Schubert

Piano Sonata No 19, D958. Impromptus, D935

Nicolai Lugansky *pf*

Ambrosie © AM214 (74' • DDD)



Nicolai Lugansky is an impressive pianist, with a ravishingly beautiful sound and a technique that renders dense textures with perfect clarity. His musical sensibilities are always vigilant for the expressive opportunity.

How disappointing then to encounter his new release, combining the first of the 'Drei grosse Sonaten' and the second set of Impromptus, all dating from the last year of Schubert's life. One question, for instance, what text Lugansky uses when the *sforzandos*, those sudden emphases so characteristic of Schubert's piano music, are observed roughly half the number times indicated in the score. Lugansky mistakenly equates the softening *decrescendo* with a slowing *ritenuto*, in many instances effectively dissipating any sense of urgent momentum. He is averse to short, crisp *staccatos* and his habit of hanging on to them a fraction too long reduces the variety and pliancy of his articulation.

The more limited dynamic palette of 1820s Viennese pianos suggests that

Schubert's subtler dynamic markings, say the difference between a *piano* and *mezzo-forte*, indicate not only a change in volume of sound but also in its character. Failure to observe this sort of nuance makes the lovely *Rosamunde* variations here sound as though they were delivered in monotone.

Throughout, a luxurious, velvety *legato* is the default articulation, with a habitual pulling back at the end of phrases to lend expression. Effective though this can be in Rachmaninov and Scriabin, in Schubert it courts disaster. The delicate A flat Impromptu, already taken far slower than the *allegretto* indicated, simply deflates. A curious agogic hesitation inserted at the beginning of the Fourth Impromptu causes it to stumble the moment it leaves the gate and thereafter limp to the finish. The Sonata's exquisite *Adagio* is so insouciantly pedestrian that it loses its way entirely, while calculated rhythmic regularity in the tarantella finale turns monotonous, reducing this desperate flight from the Furies to an almost carefree *wilde Jagd*. **Patrick Rucker**

Scriabin

Complete Etudes

Dmitri Alexeev *pf*

Brilliant © 94439 (75' • DDD)



With his Chopin Mazurkas (see page 70) and an earlier Brilliant set of Scriabin sonatas,

Dmitri Alexeev marks a return to the studios. He pipped Schiff and Uchida – no less – to the winning post in the 1973 Leeds Piano Competition but has since enjoyed a quiet rather than noisy acclaim. His Scriabin recital of the complete Etudes (including some miscellaneous works designated as such) is a fine addition to the composer's discography. Alexeev can blaze out into the light when required but his playing is most notable for the way he tempers Scriabin's frequently wild excesses with dignity and restraint, a refreshing change from other more obvious, fire-eating performances.

There is no lack of adrenalin, of thunder and lightning in the nightmare gallop of the Etude Op 8 No 9 (*Alla ballata*), yet there is a no less winning gentleness in the central oasis of calm. You may miss something of Horowitz's mesmerising brio in the explosive double-note flight of Op 8 No 10 (has any pianist been more attuned to Scriabin's volatility and eroticism?), in the turbulent C sharp minor, Op 42 No 5, or in trills like the maddening hum of a mosquito in No 3. There is also a greater sense of mobility and dexterity in Piers Lane's Hyperion recording

of the Etudes. But there is ample reward in Alexeev's reserve. He may not 'emit light and be surrounded in an air of witchcraft' (a description of Scriabin's own playing) but his overall musicianship brings its own rewards, and he has been well recorded. **Bryce Morrison**

Etudes – selected comparison:

Lane (12/92) (HYPE) CDH55242

Shostakovich

Preludes and Fugues, Op 87

Craig Sheppard *pf*

Roméo Ⓢ ② 7315/16 (162' • DDD)

Recorded live at Meany Theater, Seattle, April 2015



In his accompanying notes to this live recording, Craig Sheppard quotes Kurt

Sanderling's comment that if Shostakovich's 24 Preludes and Fugues are his crowning and austere keyboard masterpiece, they are also his most 'intimate diary'. This surely hints at the inwardness and complexity of an awe-inspiring opus created under painful and troubling circumstances. Composed at white heat in 1950 and 1951, Op 87 is a reply to the Soviet authorities' scorn for music beyond their comprehension and a reaching-out to those with less banal musical expectations. First performed by Tatyana Nikolaieva, their dedicatee, in 1952, they are a 'testament to triumph over adversity' (Sheppard) and a worthy successor to Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*.

Generally, short preludes are followed by extended fugues, both understandably a witness to extreme mood-swings and uncertain temper. Even a direction such as *tranquillo* is tinged with irony and the overall effect is powerful and sardonic. The anguish of Prelude No 14, expressed in shuddering *tremolandos*, hints at the pressure Shostakovich worked under, while the innocent and beguiling start to Prelude No 13 leads typically to vehemence and unrest. Again, and characteristically, the crazy-paving Fugue No 15 turns mordant wit into savagery, and it is only in Fugue No 24 that defiance turns to victory in a massive carillon of Moscow bells.

The demands both musical and technical are immense and were met by Nikolaieva and Melnikov (not forgetting selections by Richter, Gilels and a single offering of No 15 from Terence Judd, whose virtuosity in the 1978 Tchaikovsky Piano Competition set his Moscow audience by the ears) with unfailing skill and dedication. Sheppard now joins their company in performances of unfailing lucidity and musicianship. His previous recordings of Bach's major

keyboard works – to say nothing of the daunting fugue from Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata – tell us that he has no fear of even the most intimidating part-writing. And here, clearly at the zenith of his career, he achieves a brilliantly inclusive poise and brio that go to the very heart of Shostakovich. He ends the Fugue No 24 in a blaze of *maestoso* glory and a storm of cheers. Finely recorded, this is a memorable issue. **Bryce Morrison**

Selected comparisons:

Nikolaieva (3/91) (HYPE) CDA66441/3

Melnikov (8/10) (HARM) HMC90 2019/20

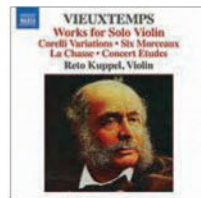
Vieuxtemps

Six Etudes de concert, Op 16. Etudes, Op 48 – selection. Six Morceaux, Op 55.

La chasse, Op 32 No 3

Reto Kuppel *vn*

Naxos Ⓢ 8 573339 (74' • DDD)



Vieuxtemps was among the foremost of the post-Paganini generation of violinist-

composers. That his music should be so little heard and so much undervalued may be a hangover from the days of German hegemony, but there is surely no excuse for it to be ignored today. It is skilfully written, highly inventive and melodic and – as strongly demonstrated on this disc – combines all the tricks that Paganini ever invented with the classical restraint of de Bériot, Vieuxtemps's teacher.

These three groups of six études for solo violin merit a place in any recital programme, while 'La chasse' from the *Three Salon Pieces*, Op 32, or almost any single étude from the above would make a worthy encore: like all the best études, they don't sound like études. I can only guess that more violinists don't play, for example, Op 48 No 6 ('Erzählung') or No 7 ('Qual') because they haven't bothered to investigate Vieuxtemps or have been told by their teachers not to bother.

The German Reto Kuppel, a Dorothy DeLay/Juillard alumnus, is superbly attuned to the genre, as attested by his earlier Naxos disc of solo studies and caprices by Ferdinand David. All the necessary brilliance and incisive attack is there as you would expect, but also the same breadth and power of tone which was, from all accounts, part of what made Vieuxtemps's own playing so remarkable.

That said, even this devoted admirer found 74 minutes and 10 seconds of unaccompanied Vieuxtemps too much to take at a sitting (as he would for Bach,

Paganini or Ysaÿe). And he would have been even more pleasantly surprised by these discoveries had he come across them nestling between, say, the *Ballade et Polonaise*, Op 38, or *Fantasia appassionata*, Op 35. Still, we must be grateful to Naxos for giving us, despite their limited market appeal, the opportunity of hearing these buried treasures. **Jeremy Nicholas**

'20th Century Harpsichord Music'

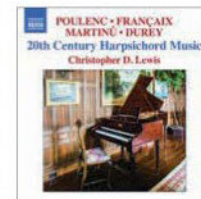
Durey Dix Inventions **Françaix** Deux Pièces

Martinů Deux Impromptus. Deux Pièces.

Harpsichord Sonata **Poulenc** Suite française

Christopher D Lewis *hpd*

Naxos Ⓢ 8 573364 (60' • DDD)



The presence of the pioneering harpsichordist Wanda Landowska in early-

20th-century Paris inspired many composers to write for her. Her instrument of choice was a heavy cased Pleyel model with two keyboards and a wide variety of registrations designed more for the concert hall than the salon. Since Christopher Lewis is nothing if not 'authenticity minded', he has opted for a recently restored 1930s Pleyel.

Although Landowska did not record any of these pieces, it wouldn't be presumptuous to read a few 'Wanda-isms' into the rhythmic swagger and specificity of articulation that Lewis brings to Poulenc's *Suite française*: the gravitas of the Pavane's rolled chords or the Complainte's masterful finger *legato*, for example. In turn, the oaken timbred lute stop intensifies the impact of the dissonances throughout the first of Françaix's previously unrecorded *Deux Pièces*. Of the three Martinů works, the three-movement Sonata holds the most interest with its disarmingly simple melodies that gradually veer into unpredictable, asymmetrical directions. Yet the first of his 1935 *Deux Pièces* features gnarly slow-moving chords that benefit from the Pleyel's weighty bass.

Although Louis Durey's *Ten Inventions* (another first recording) were originally scored for various instrumental combinations, they resonate beautifully on the Pleyel from one register to another, such as in No 3's slowly cascading imitative passages, No 7's wide interval leaps, No 8's *faux* Bach allusions and the modal No 10's closely overlapping counterpoint. Kudos to Lewis for exploring a fascinating corner of 20th-century harpsichord history in the right way, and to the terrific booklet-notes by Graham Wade. **Jed Distler**

Francis Pott

Linking contemporary and ancient music, and displaying Western traditions with an Eastern European ethnicity, Francis Pott is a unique composer in touch with his human side, writes **Caroline Gill**

To describe Francis Pott's personality to help define his musical style feels both irrelevant and slightly intrusive. He is so gently modest and humorous that, when these qualities combine with a courteous intellectual rigour and sharp intelligence, it is no surprise that his music fuses accessibility with a challenging element that invites repeated listening. It engages the ear with all the humanity of its deceptively traditional harmony and melody, but retains the listener's attention with its skill and logic: nothing is flashy, everything is carefully considered and, as the organist Jeremy Filsell puts it, those in the know will travel all over the country to hear his work.

The roots of Pott's musical training lie in his experience as a chorister at New College, Oxford, under David Lumsden in the 1960s. Pott and Lumsden are now neighbours in Winchester and, given Pott's alertness to the importance of musical influences – wherever they may come from – it is no surprise that Pott is still in touch with many of the musicians who shaped his musical development. Raymond Humphrey, his music teacher at Winchester College, and Hugh Wood,

It is the choral tradition that has been particularly vital in Pott's development, and it still guides his work today

his composition supervisor at Cambridge, have continued to loom large in Pott's life, despite the spreading of his own compositional wings since leaving their tutelage. The one musician who no longer plays an active part is his fellow chorister Dickon Peschek, whose untimely death is behind the dedication of Pott's choral music collection for Signum, 'Meditations and Remembrances', and whose own ability to compose with confidence and innate joy profoundly affected Pott while still a boy. It is the choral tradition that has been particularly vital in Pott's development as a composer, and it still guides his work today. This is not simply because so much of his work is choral but because his music displays a fundamental intellectual apprehension that music written 400 years ago (say, the hymnody of William Byrd) and highly abstract music written within the last six months are essentially the same in their validity as original art.

That is not to say that Pott will suffer compositional fools gladly; he has, in the past, been vocal about what he calls the 'McDonald's-isation' of (mainly choral) music: 'fast' music that he suggests takes about the same amount of time to listen to as it does to compose. His Christmas piece *Balulalow*, written in 2009 for the Choir of Christ Church, Dublin, has



become well known to the point of entering the standard Christmas repertoire for professional, cathedral and amateur choirs alike, despite its steadfast refusal to conform to sentimental Christmas musical stereotypes. Moreover, this short piece represents Pott's compositional style in microcosm: a minutely wrought harmonic structure combined with an ingenious use of compositional techniques (in this case, free variation) to construct a piece that stands up to rigorous technical scrutiny, while retaining a strong appeal to the human side of any listener thanks to the warm tonality of its melodies and their harmonisations.

Therein lies the 'human logic' that is at the heart of Pott's music, and which is one of its greatest recommendations: that it is able to stand up purely aesthetically, despite being grounded in great skill and academic insight. Further substance is given to it, too, by its strong moral perspective: Pott does not define himself as religious, despite his long-term involvement with Church music, but he is more concerned with man's inhumanity to man. His unusual choice (and use) of text in his choral music is the most immediate evidence of his pursuit of a more humanitarian goal than writing purely devotional music. To that end, his oratorio *The Cloud of Unknowing* (2006), written to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Vasari Singers, was premiered in London very close to the site of the terrorist bomb that exploded on 7/7. Although the piece was written to bear some resemblance to an Anglican act of worship, it was the first time Pott stepped out of anything specifically Christian in his choral



POTT FACTS

Born 1957, Wallingford, Oxfordshire (then in Berkshire)

Studied Chorister at New College, Oxford; Music scholar at Winchester College and Magdalene College, Cambridge, studying composition under Hugh Wood and Robert Simpson (among others)

Career Secondary school teaching for seven years in London, gradually moving over to tutorial teaching at Oxford University; lecturer in music at St Hilda's College, Oxford; layclerk at Winchester Cathedral and the Temple Church, London; Head of Music at the London College of Music; Professor of Composition, London College of Music

Key moment *A Song on the End of the World* – the Elgar Commission for the 1999 Three Choirs Festival – a 75-minute oratorio for three soloists, chorus, orchestra and organ, the title of which comes from a Czesław Miłosz poem written in Nazi-occupied Warsaw in 1944. The orchestra for the premiere was the Philharmonia, conducted by Adrian Lucas

music, drawing on texts by William Blake, Wilfred Owen and René Arcos (the French First World War poet), as well as the 23rd Psalm. Similarly, although in a more specifically musical context, the anthem *My Song Is Love Unknown* (2002) disrupts certain words from their original context in order to illustrate a perennially human conflict rather than to create a plain reflection of an Anglican evensong.

The large scale of *The Cloud of Unknowing* suggested Pott's intention to move towards heftier orchestral – and instrumental – music. In the piece, he works from the outside in, creating a structure that will take the weight of 90 minutes of music before working on the notes themselves. (Pott's current commissions include a large-scale choral work that will involve the Philharmonia Orchestra in 2017.) The Viola Sonata (2014) displays similar symphonic ambitions in its cyclical form: Pott presents the final movement as a synthesis of the first two. It's the most recent example of his attraction to the logic of structure, which both informs the compositional process and offers incidental detail and interest along the way.

Nielsen and Medtner are among the mainstream composers whose shadows are cast over his thought processes (although their reflections are lost completely in the strong individual identity of Pott's own music); his music also displays a quiet enthusiasm for the less well-known work of Wilhelm Stenhammar and the American Paul Schoenfield, whose klezmer music can also feature Bartók, Bach and Mozart in walk-on parts. Vaughan Williams can be detected, too, but

more in the sense that both he and Pott are able to evoke the 16th century through their use of proper 'triadic' harmony (that is to say, harmony built on chords of music that have not been tampered with in any way).

Just as it is natural to suggest that the music of Vaughan Williams rejuvenated English music through the idiomatic assimilation of early English music, it is fair to suggest that Pott has done something similar. It is, though, impossible to describe Pott's music as at all derivative, and any listener presented with his work 'blind' might be forgiven for mistaking his nationality for Balkan; his music doesn't display any of the features of English folksong or Tudor hymnody that have been such driving forces behind his instinct to become a composer. The harmonic personality of the Cello Sonata, for instance (written in 1997, and then extensively revised in 2001), is often built on a wayward relationship between the bass and upper parts, the bottom line not always having anything beyond a long-term gravitational relationship with the harmony above it, which, perhaps unexpectedly, gives off more than a whiff of Eastern Europe.

So, to describe Pott's own character in describing his music is, perhaps, relevant after all. The friendly eloquence and wide-ranging references that are so conducive to rewarding conversation also add an almost confidential elegance to his music. It leaves the listener thinking that something uniquely personal is being directed at them, while at the same time knowing others feel the same. There is a commonly perceived image of the modern composer as being self-absorbed, leading to music that's impenetrable by anyone but themselves. The attractiveness of Pott's complex but warm, human music, though, is testament to his willingness to draw on the lessons of Byrd, Schoenfield and Stenhammar as much as the example of Dickon Peschek. **G**

FRANCIS POTT ON DISC

A trio of recordings that reveal Pott's musical voice

**The Cloud of Unknowing**

Vasari Singers / Jeremy Backhouse

Signum © 2 SIGCD105 (10/07)

Commissioned for the London Festival

of Contemporary Church Music, this is a fundamentally tonal, richly harmonic, chromatic work whose great scale and length does nothing to undermine the power of the text.

**Balulalow**

Commotio / Matthew Berry

Naxos © 8 572739 (2/12)

A small-scale, a *cappella* Christmas piece for soprano solo and four-part divided choir. It's a

hidden gem of Pott's music, with a gentle beginning broadening out into a soaring soprano solo that sits over a clever set of variations on that opening material.

**The Towers of Man: Sonata for Viola and Piano.****Einziges Tage**

Yuko Inoue *va* Francis Pott *pf* Alla Kravchuk *sop*

Simon Phillips *pf*

EM Records © EMRCDO28 (11/15)

This piece was inspired by a series of folly towers dotted around the Isle of Man, and one in particular that was built as a memorial to a family killed by a 17th-century smallpox epidemic.

Vocal



Richard Wigmore listens to a brace of new Creations:

'Herreweghe brings refinement and subtlety, balancing reverence and a sense of awe with a twinkle in the eye' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 84**



Alexandra Coghlan on Apollo's Fire's Christmassy Praetorius:

'What they do so uniquely well is capture the homespun spirit of music intended to unite a congregation' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 86**

JS Bach



JS Bach Cantata No 63, Christen, ätzet diesen Tag. Magnificat, BWV243a. Organ Preludes - Fuga sopra il Magnificat, BWV733; Gott, durch deine Güte, BWV600; Puer natus in Bethelehem, BWV603; Vom Himmel hoch, BWV606

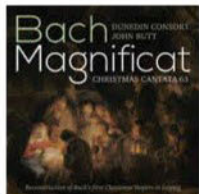
G Gabrieli Hodie Christus natus est

Julia Doyle, Joanne Lunn *sops* **Clare Wilkinson** *mez*

Nicholas Mulroy *ten* **Matthew Brook** *bass-bar*

Dunedin Consort / John Butt

Linn (P) CKD469 (78' • DDD • T/t)



We have got used to the idea now that, coming from the Dunedin Consort,

core works will not be quite as they first appear. The Bach *Magnificat* here is not the piece in its familiar D major version but its original manifestation, cast in E flat and with some slight textual differences, while further potential surprises are that the disc starts with a Gabrieli motet and that the *Magnificat* doesn't appear until track 13. The reason, of course, is that this is another of director John Butt's liturgical reconstructions, this time of Vespers in Leipzig's Nikolaikirche on Christmas Day 1723, Bach's first in the job of Kantor. The *Magnificat* thus gains four delightful little Christmas interpolative movements and sits within a longer programme of congregational chorales and organ preludes (shared between Butt and Stephen Farr on the marvellous organ of Greyfriars Kirk), the Gabrieli and the lyrical, lithe, trumpet-bright Cantata No 63. A full reconstruction would have been too long for the CD, so some extra preludes and a clutch of chant-prayers are downloadable free from the Linn website, where you can also read Butt's scholarly booklet-notes.

As usual the forces are small-scale, save for two lusty congregational hymns (adorned with enjoyably headstrong organ improvisations). The *Magnificat* itself is exciting, fresh and faultlessly paced: the crystal stream of the first chorus, the 'Et exultavit' taking just enough time to allow

Joanne Lunn to shape her phrases, the compelling build in 'Fecit potentiam' to a timpani-powered conclusion – so many interpretative decisions here seem the right ones. The sound (helped perhaps by the low pitch of A=392Hz) is a treat for the ear; the vocal soloists are lucid and distinctive, so that altogether this vital performance is not just a genuinely fascinating new slant on a familiar masterpiece – as the Dunedins' *St John Passion* was (3/13) – but a joyous re-encounter with an old friend.

As for those good churchpeople of Leipzig hearing it for the first time, how they must have marvelled at the man they had hired! **Lindsay Kemp**

JS Bach



Mass in B minor, BWV232

Hannah Morrison *sop* **Esther Brazil** *mez* **Meg**

Bragle, Kate Symonds-Joy *contrs* **Peter Davoren,**

Nick Pritchard *tens* **Alex Ashworth, David Shipley**

basses **Monteverdi Choir; English Baroque Soloists**

/ Sir John Eliot Gardiner

Soli Deo Gloria (M) (2) SDG722 (106' • DDD • T/t)



The degree to which conductors are more or less synonymous with particular works

is a largely subjective matter, though few would argue that the Mass in B minor captures with special pertinence the flavour of John Eliot Gardiner's distinctive contribution to music-making over 50 years of professional life. While he has only recorded the work once before, in 1985, performances of the work have peppered his career in all four corners of the globe. That recording was something of a yardstick at a time when the pioneering compact disc coincided with the second birth of the 'early music movement' in tsunami mode: Gardiner let rip, in short, with a towering performance of blazing choruses and oratorian solos, firmly planting his feet in the DG space that Karl Richter had vacated with his early death four years earlier.

If that performance now seems uncontained in a bristling vigour of varying durability, the intervening 30 years have transformed Gardiner's B minor with his consistently impressive Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists from something less culturally reactive and adrenalin-driven towards a more contained, pictorial and inhabited ideal, though no less energised. If there was anything Gardiner learnt from the monumental traversal of the cantatas during that great millennium year, it was to take longer-breathed interpretative positions with Bach and to know when to let the singers, especially, and the music do the work.

From the outset here, Gardiner's meticulous grasp of the detail and architecture in tandem is almost terrifyingly auspicious. The *Kyrie* has never felt more naturally contrasting in both that respect and in the etched placement (some might find it a touch too articulated) of the fugal entries; it's a 'melos' – an unbroken evolution of line – which becomes especially evident from the tautly conceived 'Et in unum' and the most luscious 'Et incarnatus', each underpinned by skilful dynamic contouring.

Indeed, the idea of the Mass as Bach's 'summa' anthology (a work that may never even have been conceived as a single piece) has often inhibited that elusive golden 'arc' where the culminating 'Dona nobis' feels magnetised to all before it. How can it be uncovered without pressing too hard on the tempi or under-curating those reflections of discrete stillness? If Brüggén's first reading with its purity of abstraction comes close in its controversially instrument-heavy recording and, more recently, Jonathan Cohen's elegant and generous account asks further questions – albeit in the difficult acoustic of Tetbury Church – we have a further vision here with Gardiner's extraordinary, single-minded, quasi-mathematical proof.

It starts with peerless choral singing, the trumpet-led movements bolted into an unerring tactus and purring through the gears; the 'Et exspecto' with its luminous lead-in is quite miraculous, as is the shining



Peter Dijkstra conducts the Bavarian Radio Chorus and the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin in Bach's Christmas Oratorio

portal of the *Sanctus*. Such is Gardiner's dramatic placement that the predominance of D major never palls. Less consistent are the solo movements. Gardiner's policy of showcasing young vocal talent inevitably leads to occasional gaucheness and some hints of tiredness, but the price is small: there is much that is winning, and the 'Laudamus te' (Hannah Morrison) is one of several examples of fresh tenderness.

Out of this youthful paradigm emerges an especially corporate endeavour, one that challenges pre-conceived ideas on vocal and instrumental 'role-play', and celebrates Bach's endlessly sophisticated relationship between players and singers: perspectives where our modern ears are forced to re-evaluate expectations within our conventional understanding. This is borne out in many ways, none more than the dialogues of the 'Quoniam', where the bass, horn and bassoons fulfil many purposes in a changing canvas.

Gardiner's admiration for this work is palpable in every bar, perhaps over-curated for some; and if so the softer-hues of Cohen may be preferred. But in the grip of its conceits and its virtuoso executancy, captured in the strikingly immediate recorded sound of LSO St Luke's, this High Mass joins a distinguished discography at high table. **Jonathan Freeman-Attwood**

Selected comparisons:

Gardiner (2/86) (ARCH) 415 514-2AH2

Brüggen (2/90*) (DECC) 480 0098

Cohen (11/14) (HYPERION) CDA68051/2

Handel

Messiah, HWV56

Julia Doyle *sop* **Lawrence Zazzo** *countertenor*

Steve Davis *lim* **ten** **Neal Davies** *bass-bar*

Bavarian Radio Chorus; B'Rock / Peter Dijkstra

BR-Klassik (F) ② 900 510 (136' • DDD • T)

Recorded live at the Herkulesaal, Munich, November 21-27, 2014

JS Bach

Weihnachtsoratorium, BWV248

Rachel Harnisch, Sonja Philippin *sops*

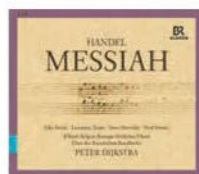
Anke Vondung *mez* **Maximilian Schmitt** *ten*

Christian Immeler *bass* **Bavarian Radio Chorus;**

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin / Peter Dijkstra

BR-Klassik (F) ② 900512 (144' • DDD • T)

Recorded live at the Herkulesaal, Munich, December 11 & 12, 2010



In the last few years the Bavarian Radio Choir and its conductor Peter Dijkstra has

notched up a selective discography of impressive live recordings of major Baroque choral masterworks, always with acclaimed period-instrument guest orchestras and top-notch soloists. This new *Messiah* was recorded at several concerts in Munich in November 2014. Dijkstra prefers a traditional four-soloist version, featuring all the best music from numerous alternative variants, and his dependable direction combines many elements of historically informed performance practice with the best traditional choral qualities of contrapuntal flexibility and pious dignity. Organ is over-used in arias (Handel probably reserved it for the choruses), but it often imparts a sense of solemn dignity without tempi actually dragging. Paradoxically, crisp harpsichord is often prominent in choruses. The Belgian orchestra B'Rock tone down the eccentricities evident in some of their previous Handel recordings under different leadership.

The Bavarian Radio Choir's spotless English, dramatic intensity in powerful minor-key statements ('Surely he hath borne our griefs'), polished shaping of lightly tripping fugal choruses ('His yoke is easy'), and fulsome sonorities in the grand conclusions to Parts 2 and 3 (the splendid account of 'Hallelujah' features horns doubling an octave below the trumpets)

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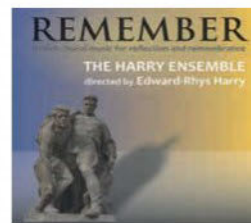
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The disc is available direct from the ensemble or on iTunes GooglePlay and Amazon. Please see below for its contents.

www.harryensemble.com

Karl Jenkins - The Spirit of The Lord
Herbert Howells - The Shadows
James MacMillan - Ave Maris Stella
Robert Pearsall - Lay a Garland
Ed Rex - Do Not Stand At My Grave And Weep
Arthur Sullivan - The Long Day Closes
Will Todd - Amazing Grace
Edward-Rhys Harry - Ave Verum Corpus
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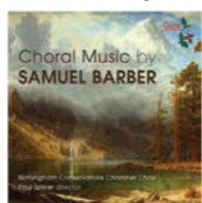
Julia Doyle sings 'I know that my Redeemer liveth' with affecting serenity. Lawrence Zazzo's stylistic nous, dramatic fervour and impeccable diction mean that the words 'For he is like a refiner's fire' have thrilling impact. Steve Davislim drops his 'y' in 'Comfort ye, my people' (so as to seem to invite us round for tea), but performs 'Thy rebuke hath broken his heart' with impeccable softness, whereas a bit of muscle is applied adeptly for 'Thou shalt break them'. Neal Davies is suavely eloquent without bluster in 'The trumpet shall sound' (the use of organ in the middle section is cumbersome). On a few occasions overlong pregnant pauses between movements undermine the flow of the oratorio, but this sincere *Messiah* has plenty to offer.

The *Christmas Oratorio* was recorded across two concerts four years earlier. The celebratory first cantata *Jauchzet, frohlocket* instantly establishes the thrilling energy and vibrancy Dijkstra achieves in the festive choruses. In buoyant fugues the Bavarian Radio Choir and the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin dispatch Bach's florid lines and textures with shapely agility, and also deliver muscular heft when Bach calls for it. Those who like to hear Bach's church music sung by a largish chamber choir might relish the lovingly shaped chorales. The booklet ought to credit the players of the regally assured trumpet part in Christian Immler's calmly authoritative 'Grosser Herr', the nonchalant flute in Maximilian Schmitt's lyrical 'Frohe Hirten', the assortment of pastoral woodwinds in Anke Vondung's lullaby 'Schlafe, mein Liebster', and the *cantabile* oboe in dialogue with Rachel Harnisch (and her echo) in 'Flösst, mein Heiland'.

David Vickers

Barber

Reincarnations, Op 16. Easter Chorale^a. God's Grandeur. Let down the bars, O Death! Antony and Cleopatra - Two Choruses^b. The Monk and his Cat^b. Under the Willow Tree^b. A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map^c. Motetto on Words from the Book of Job. The Virgin Martyrs. The Moon^b. Sure on this Shining Night^b. Ad bibinem cum me rogaret ad cenam. Heaven-Haven. Agnus Dei Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir / Paul Spicer with ^bBen Kennedy ^{pf}ac Matthew Firkins ^{timp}^aBirmingham Conservatoire Brass Ensemble Somm Céleste © SOMMCD0152 (73' • DDD • T/t)



In 1981 Menotti told me that he disapproved of Barber's transcription

of the famous Adagio into a choral piece and said he did it only to make money. Look at the situation now – it's the most powerful of all his choral works, but it's very demanding. The gold standard has been set recently by Polyphony under Stephen Layton (Hyperion, 8/14): he takes nine minutes but with Paul Spicer it's all over in six and a half. It is unfair to start with the weakest performance from the young Birmingham Conservatoire team because there are valuable things on this new CD. Anyone really interested in Barber's choral music will want to hear the prentice works as part of the picture, showing Barber's origins. Some are pallidly academic, to suit his conservative teacher at the Curtis Institute, but the setting of Gerard Manley Hopkins's 'God's Grandeur' is a discovery. There also two choruses, with piano, from Barber's controversial opera *Antony and Cleopatra*.

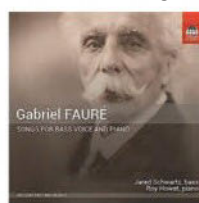
Spicer has rightly realised that the much-repeated word 'beautiful' in 'To be sung on the water' would sound better in an American accent. 'A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map' sets a strange poem by Stephen Spender, stemming from a Spanish Civil War tragedy, for male voices and timpani. Early performances found tuning to timpani a problem; various instrumental additions were tried but the original is now standard, with no problems here. The choir is well balanced and manages high notes with aplomb, although the low bass-lines are not so clear. Nevertheless, this is an attractive release.

Peter Dickinson

Fauré

'Songs for Bass Voice and Piano' L'absent, Op 5 No 3. Aurore, Op 39 No 1. La chanson du pecheur, Op 4 No 2. Chant d'automne, Op 5 No 1. Dans la forêt de septembre, Op 85 No 1. Le don silencieux, Op 92. En sourdine, Op 58 No 2. Fleur jetée, Op 39 No 2. La fleur qui va sur l'eau, Op 85 No 2. Mandoline, Op 58 No 1. Les matelots, Op 2 No 2. Nocturne, Op 43 No 2. Le parfum impérissable, Op 76 No 1. Les présents, Op 46 No 1. Prison, Op 83 No 1. Sérénade toscane, Op 3 No 2. Tristesse, Op 6 No 2. Tristesse d'Olympio. Three Songs - Op 7; Op 8. Le voyageur, Op 18 No 2

Jared Schwartz ^{bass} Roy Howat ^{pf} Toccata Classics © TOCCO268 (60' • DDD • T/t)



This is a recording unique unto itself, so comparisons with the dozens of other interpretations of Fauré's songs already available would not be especially

instructive. The factor that puts the disc in a special category is that the American singer Jared Schwartz is a bass, albeit a bass with an outstanding flexibility and range. Fauré's songs tend to be assigned to higher voices, and this seems to be the first time that a bass has featured on a whole disc of them. The only song of these 25 that is not claimed as a first is the Théophile Gautier setting 'Chanson du pêcheur (Lamento)', presumably because it appears on a CD of mixed French repertoire entitled 'Rencontres: Mélodies françaises' by the Italian bass Carlo Colombara (Dynamic).

But there is an added rarity in the fact that Schwartz sings two items in the original Tuscan rather than the customary French. The fact that these include probably Fauré's most famous song, 'Après un rêve' – or 'Levati, sol' – might raise the odd eyebrow, but Schwartz, as throughout this programme, has a feeling for colour and mood. From his diction you can tell that he is not French, nor indeed Tuscan, but he compensates with mellifluous lines and a malleability of timbre. All the songs suit his musicality well, and some – such as the angry 'Fleur jetée' and the introspective 'L'absent' – seem positively to gain from Schwartz's intensity. Roy Howat, on whose new edition of Fauré's songs this selection is based, is a stylistically perceptive, sensitive accompanist. **Geoffrey Norris**

Gabrieli

'1615 - Gabrieli in Venice'

In ecclesiis. Canzon seconda. Suscipe, clementissime Deus. Hodie completi sunt dies pentecostes. Jubilate Deo. Canzon terza. Quem vidistis pastores. Sonata XXI con tre violini. Exsultavit cor meum in Domino. Surrexit Christus. Canzone prima. Litaniae Beatissimae Mariae Virginis. Magnificat The Choir of King's College, Cambridge; His Majestys Sagbutts & Cornetts / Stephen Cleobury King's College © () + () KGS0012 (73' • DDD/DSD • 5.1 Dolby True HD, Dolby Atmos & LPCM stereo • T/t)



From 1585 Giovanni Gabrieli was organist at St Mark's Basilica and also director of music

for the confraternity at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, where in 1608 the English visitor Thomas Coryat heard three hours of music 'so good, so delectable, so rare, so admirable...that it did even ravish and stupifie'. Gabrieli's music can still have the same impact four centuries later, and the range of thrilling sonorities and ceremonial theatricalities in his church music – choral

and instrumental – is commemorated in this quadricentenary celebration of two 1615 publications issued posthumously by the composer's colleagues: seven elaborate polychoral motets, a litany for the Virgin Mary and a grand setting of the *Magnificat* are taken from the second book of *Symphoniae Sacrae*, and His Majesty's Sagbutts & Cornetts take centre stage in four instrumental works from *Canzoni et Sonate*.

In *ecclesiis* never fails to generate an awestruck sense of wonder when the brass chords enter after the first few vocal solos and choral 'Alleluia' refrains; the soloists Gabriel May (treble), Patrick Dunachie (countertenor) and Toby Ward (tenor) soar angelically, although the resplendent *tutti* phrases lack imposing majesty, rhythmical vigour and theatrical incision. In some respects, The Choir of King's College are softer and more consoling than one often hears in this repertoire, but such an unforced solemnity suits the concentrated low textures of the all-adult voices in the 12-part *Suscipe, clementissime Deus*. The opening of the 10-part setting of *Jubilate Deo omnis terra* conveys an imperious swagger, with Cleobury's surprisingly steady tempo not only suitable for the reverberant acoustic of the antechapel at King's College but also a reminder that St Mark's Byzantine basilica would have presented similar challenges to its musicians. It was recorded in the round, and audiophiles will be attracted to the Pure Audio Blu-ray Disc, which offers an immersive experience utilising Dolby Atmos technology – but there's nothing about the conventional hybrid SACD format that will short-change those wanting to luxuriate in the glory of late Renaissance Venice.

David Vickers

Handel

'Early Italian Works'

Agrippina – Sinfonia; Pensieri, voi mi tormentate. Apollo e Dafne, HWV122 – Felicissima quest'alma^a. Dixit Dominus, HWV232 – Tecum principium. La Resurrezione, HWV47 – Disserratevi, o porte d'Averno. Rodrigo – Per dar pregio all'amor mio^b. Salve regina, HWV241. Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno, HWV46a – Come nembo che fugge col vento^b; Lascia la spina; Pure del cielo intelligenze eterne...Tu del ciel ministro eletto^b; Un pensiero nemico di pace
Julia Lezhneva *sop*^b Dmitry Sinkovsky *vn*
Il Giardino Armonico / Giovanni Antonini *aff*
Decca © 478 6766DH (70' • DDD • T/t)



Julia Lezhneva performs nine arias and a Marian hymn all composed during

Handel's extended trip to Italy between late 1706 and early 1710. This conceptual theme has been done several times before, and the clichéd choices of arias are disappointing. The only less predictable choices are 'Tecum principium' from *Dixit Dominus* (which does not work as a concert item out of context) and Esilena's 'Per dar pregio all'amor mio' from *Rodrigo* (one of several numbers featuring finely shaded violin solos by guest concertmaster Dmitry Sinkovsky).

Reservations about the complacent concept are diminished by Lezhneva's singing – crystalline in tone and dazzlingly precise in the rapid passagework of the Angel's 'Disseratevi, o porte d'Averno' from *La Resurrezione* (played by Il Giardino Armonico with their customary snap, crackle and pop). Lezhneva's wallowingly gorgeous 'Lascia la spina' will please plenty of punters but I found it neglectful of the specific nature of the dramatic text; instead of conveying Piacere's attempt to beguile Bellezza to choose short-term carnality over long-term virtue, this sounds uncannily like a particularly self-indulgent stab at Almirena's plaint in *Rinaldo* (Handel's music is very similar on paper, but the words and dramatic intentions of the characters means that it is not merely the same). The opening of *Salve regina* is sung as beautifully as I've ever heard it, so it is a pity that the editor has left too much silence before the imploring sublimity of 'Ad te clamamus'. The theatricality of Agrippina's desperate soliloquy 'Pensieri, voi mi tormentate' is neatly captured.

Giovanni Antonini usually adopts gratifying tempi; he also plays flute obbligato over a charming *pizzicato* accompaniment in Dafne's wistful 'Felicissima quest'alma' (Handel composed the part for an oboe but it is hard to imagine he would have minded this much). Lezhneva's economical restraint and emotional truthfulness are spellbinding in Bellezza's 'Tu del ciel ministro eletto', but this is not quite matched by Sinkovsky's meandering embellishment of the obbligato violin part. This curate's egg of a disc sometimes misses its mark on multiple levels but at its best there are some special moments that every Handelian will savour.

David Vickers

Haydn

Die Schöpfung

Christina Landshamer *sop* Maximilian Schmitt *ten*
Rudolf Rosen *bass* Collegium Vocale, Ghent;
Champs-Élysées Orchestra / Philippe Herreweghe
PHI © 2 LPH018 (97' • DDD • T/t)

Haydn

The Creation

Sarah Tynan *sop* Jeremy Ovenden *ten*

Matthew Brook *bass* Handel and Haydn Society /

Harry Christophers

Coro © 2 COR16135 (97' • DDD • T)



To Haydn's radiant vision of prelapsarian innocence, Philippe Herreweghe brings his trademark refinement and subtlety, balancing reverence and a sense of awe (say, in the first Sunrise) with a twinkle in the eye, crucial in this of all sacred works. Rarely can a chorus have hailed the 'new created world' with such chirpy eagerness. Tempi are lively (perhaps a touch too pressed in the tenor's 'Nun schwinden', aka 'Now vanish before the holy beams'), rhythms supple and springy, instrumental detail delightfully telling. As on Herreweghe's delectable *Seasons* recording (9/14), the wind (including the peerless Marcel Ponselee as first oboe) phrase and colour with a poetry and wit unsurpassed in any period recording. Crucially, too, the 40-strong chorus are nimble and youthful-sounding, softer-edged than, say, Gardiner's Monteverdi Choir, yet equal to the incandescent climax of 'Die Himmel erzählen' and nimbly negotiating their bouts of coloratura in 'Stimmt an die Saiten'.

Of the soloists, Christina Landshamer and Maximilian Schmitt are as persuasive as archangels as they were as peasants in *The Seasons*. The pellucid-toned Landshamer brings a wondering freshness and grace of ornament to both her arias, while Schmitt – fast making his name as a Mozart tenor – impresses with his lyrical elegance and veiled *pianissimo* singing in the first moonrise. The singer taking Raphael and Adam ideally needs a bass's fullness and depth and a baritone's flexibility. Though billed as a bass, Rudolf Rosen lacks an ideal *basso* weight, yet more than makes amends with his care for light and shade (not least in Haydn's tender evocation of 'the limpid brook') and his unforced relish of the text. He evidently enjoys Haydn's zoological extravaganza but resists the temptation to milk 'Gewürm'. As the first couple, Rosen and Landshamer sing their love duet with a tenderness and (in the bouncy *Allegro*) a delighted enthusiasm I have rarely heard equalled. While it is becoming ever harder to suggest an outright winner, Herreweghe's superbly sung and played



Dmitri Hvorostovsky and pianist Ivori Ilja pair settings of Renaissance poetry by Shostakovich and Liszt

Creation, finely recorded, easily holds its own with Gardiner, Christie, Spering and – my own narrow favourite among German-language versions – Harnoncourt.

Haydn conceived *The Creation* as the first bilingual oratorio, and would have been surprised at Anglophone music lovers sitting down to listen to the work in German. For obvious economic reasons, English-language recordings are still thin on the ground; and if you want a sprightly performance, on the scale of the 1808 Vienna University performance famously depicted in a wooden casket painting – a choir of some 40 singers with an orchestra of around 50 – Harry Christophers's live Boston recording should fit the bill. The Handel and Haydn Society gave the oratorio's US premiere in 1819. Under Christophers's rhythmically energetic direction, its latter-day incarnation brings an infectious zest to the celebratory choruses, even if the Bostoners yield to Herreweghe's choir in tonal refinement. Most of the tempi are virtually identical to Herreweghe's – ie brisk – though sometimes less subtly handled. Haydn's ethereal description of Paradise in Part 3 here sounds rather too businesslike. Conversely, Christophers exploits the acerbic potential of period instruments to

evoke all the mystery and dissonant eeriness of 'Chaos'.

Unlike his predecessor in 1819, Christophers employs three British soloists. All sing well and project the English text (the familiar quaintly mangled Milton, spruced up here and there) with immaculate clarity and point. Sarah Tynan, though occasionally gusty in coloratura, sings with bright, smiling tone and a sense of eager enjoyment in both 'With verdure clad' and her avian aria. She also makes a sensuous Eve. Jeremy Ovenden and Matthew Brook – more sonorously 'bassy' than Herreweghe's Rudolf Rosen – are likewise vivid story-tellers and scene-painters, lacking only delicacy in their descriptions of the brook and the first woman, though the close miking of the soloists works against them here. My own choice for a *Creation* in English is still the performance by Paul McCreesh, the only modern recording, regardless of language, to emulate the opulent forces of the 1799 premiere. But with just a few provisos, this new Boston recording can be confidently recommended. 'Can there be a more consistently happy work than *The Creation*?' asks Christophers, rhetorically, in the booklet. In his joyous, uplifting performance he is true to his word.

Richard Wigmore

Selected comparisons:

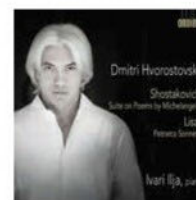
Gardiner (4/97) (ARCH) 449 217-2AH2
Harnoncourt (5/04) (DHM) 82876 58340-2
Spering (6/05) (NAXO) 6 11073/4
Christie (2/08) (VIRG) 395235-2
McCreesh (3/08) (ARCH) 477 7361AH2

Liszt • Shostakovich

Liszt *Tre Sonetti di Petrarca*, S270

Shostakovich *Suite on Verses by Michelangelo Buonarroti*, Op 145

Dmitri Hvorostovsky bar **Ivori Ilja** pf
Online © ODE1277-2 (59' • DDD • T/t)



Dmitri Hvorostovsky has always been just as comfortable on the recital platform as on

the operatic stage, a state of affairs happily reflected in the Siberian baritone's discography, packed with songs by Rachmaninov, Tchaikovsky and Mussorgsky. But Italian poetry is the inspiration for this new disc, pairing Shostakovich's bleak settings of Michelangelo (in Russian) with Liszt's *Petrarch Sonnets*.

Shostakovich composed his suite of 11 songs to mark the 500th anniversary of Michelangelo's birth, although the seed

may well have been sown when he heard Benjamin Britten's *Seven Sonnets* in Moscow in 1966. Evgeny Nesterenko gave the world premiere in 1974 and recorded the cycle the following year under the composer's watchful eye.

Hvorostovsky's baritone isn't as saturnine as Nesterenko's bass, of course, but the compensation comes in the heroic ring in his upper register. But there's no grandstanding here, as can be his way in opera. Hvorostovsky offers searching readings of these rugged, jagged songs which are full of resignation and bittersweet regret, of loss and separation. The later songs anticipate death, yet the final offering, 'Immortality', thumbs a nose at death in an insolent piano part – death cannot destroy the artist's legacy – where the nursery-rhyme simplicity is reminiscent of the Fifteenth Symphony's 'toyshop'.

Ivari Ilja, Hvorostovsky's regular accompanist, catches the prickly anger in 'Creativity', hammering at his forge. Ondine captures richer piano tone than Melodiya's rather shrill recording. Although Nesterenko is more anguished in characterisation, Hvorostovsky caresses the vocal line more in songs such as 'Night', with fewer intrusive intakes of breath than on some of his discs. There are few things finer than Hvorostovsky in full flight and Liszt's *Petrarch Sonnets* allow him the chance to open up the Italianate warmth in his baritone, with impassioned accounts, especially of Sonnet 47. **Mark Pullinger**

Shostakovich – selected comparison:

Nesterenko, Shenderovich

(12/09) (MELO) MELCD100 1609

Maderna

Requiem

Diana Tomsche *sop* **Kathrin Göring** *contr*

Bernhard Berchtold *ten* **Renatus Mészár** *bass*

MDR Radio Chorus, Leipzig; Robert-Schumann-

Philharmonie / Frank Beermann

Capriccio © C5231 (60' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Stadthalle, Chemnitz,

September 19, 2013



If Bruno Maderna's modernist page-turners – works such as *Quadrivium*,

Biogramma and his Piano Concerto – is the Maderna that matters to you, the Requiem he composed in 1946, aged 26, might leave you feeling short-changed. Still, mustn't grumble. This historically weighty slab of juvenilia, considered by Maderna himself to have been a personal turning point, had been presumed missing and lost in action.

Virgil Thomson wanted to mount a stateside premiere performance, a promise that never came to anything. But Maderna had already mailed him the score and for years it gathered dust in a New York library until its eventual first performance as recently as 2009 in Venice. And this stolidly professional performance, resonantly recorded, is the work's first outing on CD.

Mature Maderna usually dazzles, his knack of reformatting convention rarely failing him. But in 1946, two years before Hermann Scherchen introduced him to the music of Schoenberg and Webern and rocked his world, Maderna was immersed in Stravinsky and Hindemith, whose compositional fingerprints are everywhere. The spectre of Verdi looms large, too, in the bulk weight and gothic atmospherics of the writing. A young composer stakes out his terrain and cooks up a Requiem archetype.

Which is not to say there aren't inventive touches. The robust architectural splendour and unity of Part 1 is impressive indeed, especially the monumentalism of Maderna's 'Dies irae', which maps out harmonic journeys – then typically wanders elsewhere. His choral writing, at least from the perspective of 70 years later, tends towards the gesturally prosaic. Men's voices intone a rhythmically square response to the word 'Requiem', a default setting in more than one sense. But then he experiments with some satisfyingly outré part-writing in the 'Agnus Dei', voices floating on weightless, see-through strings.

This work would earn him his merit badge and open the door to grander achievements. But the presence of three pianos is suggestive of the mature Maderna. When the pianos are not bloodying the field with accents pilfered from *Les noces*, they add discreet background busyness and washes of outlying harmonic colour. In his subsequent orchestral and electronic work, Maderna would become obsessed by the spatial separation of sound. Here he's already on the case. **Philip Clark**

Parry

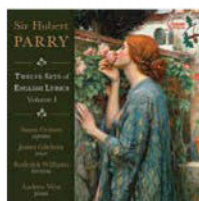
'English Lyrics & Other Songs'

English Lyrics – Set 1; Set 2; Set 3; excerpts from Sets 4, 5, 7, 10, 11 & 12. Five Sonnets

Susan Gritton *sop* **James Gilchrist** *ten*

Roderick Williams *bar* **Andrew West** *pf*

Somm © SOMMCD257 (71' • DDD • T)



Here is the first of three volumes from Somm which will embrace all 12 sets of

Parry's *English Lyrics* – a veritable cornucopia of exquisitely articulate settings of indigenous poetry which blazed a trail for the emergence of the English art song in the hands of such masters as Butterworth, Gurney, Warlock, Bridge, Ireland, Finzi and Britten. For proof positive of this figure's instinctive genius for serving the text, let me urge immediate exploration of such gems as 'Take, O take those lips away', 'Weep you no more, sad fountains' and 'Lay a garland on my hearse'. Elsewhere, it would be a hard heart indeed that failed to respond to the sly humour of 'On a time the amorous Silvy' or 'One silent night of late', the gentle poignancy of 'To Blossoms' (a sublime setting of Herrick from 1917 that occupied Parry on and off fully 40 years before he was satisfied), or the captivating charm of 'When icicles hang by the wall' (with its cheeky refrain of 'Tuwhoo! Tuwhit! Tuwhoo!'). A nourishing 71-minute sequence concludes with an early published group of four thoroughly endearing settings of Shakespeare's sonnets in German (a reminder that Parry grew up steeped in the Lied tradition of Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Brahms). A setting from the same period (1873-82) of Sonnet 32 ('If thou survive my well-contented day') also receives its long-overdue first recording.

I'm happy to report that all three soloists are thoroughly attuned to the idiom, their interpretations both admirably secure in technique and consistently pleasing in terms of intelligent word-pointing (I should add that the booklet contains full texts). Andrew West's accompaniments are admirably stylish, and Jeremy Dibble's scholarly yet personable notes prove a real boon. Boasting natural, ideally intimate sound, this is indeed a tasty first instalment. Roll on Vol 2! **Andrew Achenbach**

M Praetorius

'Christmas Vespers'

Selections from Polyhymnia caduceatrix,

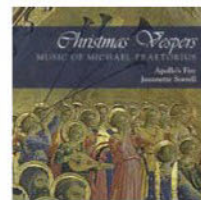
Musica Sionæ and Terpsichore

The Oberlin Choristers; The Children's Choirs of

St Paul's; Apollo's Fire; Apollo's Musettes /

Jeannette Sorrell

Avie © AV2306 (75' • DDD • T/t)



'I am not striving to recreate a complete and authentic 17th-century Vespers service... Rather, my primary goal was to create a vivid and compelling concert experience.' In prioritising drama over strict historical accuracy, Jeannette Sorrell

has made a wise decision. The result is a Christmas disc charged with all Apollo's Fire's signature energy that doesn't get too bogged down in liturgical form-filling. Which is fortunate, because Sorrell and her musicians are selling this repertoire in a crowded market-place. Paul McCreesh and the Gabrieli Consort (Archiv, 12/94) lead a field also busy with contributions from Bremer Barock, Leipzig's Thomanerchor and an excellent disc from the Toronto Consort and Chamber Choir (Marquis). All have already celebrated Christmas with the music of Michael Praetorius.

The album does take a couple of tracks to warm up. While a Processional makes structural sense, unison chanting (at a pace that verges on the ponderous) doesn't thrill, and it's only really with the hymn-setting *Wachet auf!* that things really get going, with virtuoso cornetto flourishes setting the more demure vocal contributions alight. It's a spark that grows into a blaze as the programme progresses: two soprano soloists battle with ferocious elegance in the *Gloria*, a syncopated chorus leads us in a wild dance of rejoicing in *Puer natus in Bethlehem*, while Sorrell's instrumentalists shine in the orchestral dances from *Terpsichore* – a foil to the perfectly judged simplicity of *Lo, how a rose e'er blooming*.

What Apollo's Fire do so uniquely well here is capture the homespun spirit of music intended to unite a congregation. Apollo's Singers are joined by The Oberlin Choristers and The Children's Choirs of St Paul's Church (Cleveland, Ohio), each adding character to a disc that leads with its personality – generous, all-embracing and never too precious about detail.

Alexandra Coghlan

Schubert

'Nacht und Träume'

Amalia, D195. An mein Klavier, D342. Ave Maria, D839. Dass sie hier gewesen, D775. Du bist die Ruh, D776. Die Forelle, D550. Gretchen am Spinnrade, D118. Jäger, ruhe von der Jagd, D838. Die junge Nonne, D828. Lachen und Weinen, D777. Nacht und Träume, D827. Raste, Krieger, Krieg ist aus, D837. Schwanengesang, D744. Sei mir gegrüsst, D741. Ständchen, D889. Todesmusik, D758. Wandrers Nachtlied, D768

Ailish Tynan *sop* Iain Burnside *pf*

Delphian © DCD34165 (63) • DDD • T/t



According to Delphian's website, this is the first volume of a projected series of Schubert songs featuring different singers. Ailish Tynan's not-too-constraining theme



Dorothea Röschmann and Mitsuko Uchida have recorded Schubert and Berg at London's Wigmore Hall

is 'Women in Love', which embraces some of Schubert's best-known songs for female characters, such as Ellen's three from Walter Scott's *The Lady of the Lake*, though not all. The disc is filled by popular favourites, such as 'Die Forelle' and 'Wandrers Nachtlied' (no love-smitten women there).

Tynan's limpid soprano is at its best when she is shaping some fine Schubertian phrases, calling the wanderer to rest ('balde ruhest du auch') or imagining the sensation of dying in 'Schwanengesang'. Elsewhere, the microphone sometimes catches an edge to the voice that is not evident when she is singing live. Ellen's 'Ave Maria' does not quite attain the untrammelled beauty that it might. As an interpreter, she is keen to probe minds and emotions. Her Gretchen, seated at the spinning wheel, becomes agitated to the point of vocal stress at the prospect of 'sein Kuss'. The young nun caught in the thunderstorm, accompanied with a firm grip on rhythmic momentum by Iain Burnside, is portrayed with a palpable sense of the storm within. At times, a native German-speaker might achieve more with less – 'Sei mir gegrüsst', for one, could be more disciplined – but Tynan's heart is in the right place.

For great singing in Schubert's songs for women I would be tempted to go back a

generation to a pair of inspiring singers who each left us two-disc surveys: Gundula Janowitz (DG), the epitome of classical purity, and the inimitably concentrated Janet Baker (EMI). At the end, though, Tynan's hushed poise in 'Nacht und Träume', the song that gives her disc its title, sends the listener away with a feeling of contentment. **Richard Fairman**

Schumann • Berg

Berg Sieben frühe Lieder

Schumann Frauenliebe und -leben, Op 42. Liederkreis, Op 39

Dorothea Röschmann *sop* Mitsuko Uchida *pf*

Decca © 478 8439DH (69) • DDD • T/t

Recorded live at the Wigmore Hall, London, May 2 & 5, 2015



Recorded live at the Wigmore Hall earlier this year, this disc marks the first collaboration on record between Dorothea Röschmann and Mitsuko Uchida. Right from the start, we get a sense of the quality in store – Röschmann's interpretative imagination, Uchida's supremely honed touch – even if it's clearly the German

soprano in the driving seat. Röschmann's take on the Op 39 *Liederkreis* might not be to all tastes, though. It kicks off with an 'In der Fremde' that's intensely pointed, followed by an 'Intermezzo' that offers a great deal more than mere reverie. This is Schumann whose *Innigkeit* seems – paradoxically, perhaps – to be externalised. Uchida is by no means anonymous, but her relative coolness provides an effective foil to Röschmann's intensity. 'Die Stille' is full of quick wit and delight in the words; 'Die Mondnacht' is exquisite in its calm; both 'Auf einer Burg' and 'Wehmut' are hypnotic in their concentration. But it doesn't all come off with equal success: 'Waldeggespräch' strikes me as a touch deliberate and overinterpreted, for example, while there are occasions throughout when *ritardandos* risk becoming overstretched, consonants sometimes a touch mannered.

Perhaps both the *Liederkreis* and the *Frauenliebe und -leben* have been coloured by the programme's pivot, Berg's *Seven Early Songs*. The Berg opened the second half of the concert, and finds the artists in even more completely satisfying equilibrium: the sensuality of Röschmann's voice, rich and even plummy in its lower register but soaring with purity and point to its higher reaches, juxtaposed with the chaste control of Uchida's accompaniment. It's extremely seductive and powerful.

And this more successful balancing of the elements characterises the performance of the Chamisso cycle, too. As one might expect from Röschmann, there's little sense of the obeisant wife here: the intelligence and commitment of her performance elevate the poetry above the standard charges of mawkishness and worse, and I found myself turning to Brigitte Fassbaender's long-deleted recording of the cycle (DG, 2/86) to find something similarly complex in the strength of character it communicates. Röschmann's many fans will need no encouragement, and nor will those with a more general interest in Lieder. I'm impatient to hear more from this partnership. **Hugo Shirley**

Vivaldi

Gloria, RV589. Laetatus sum, RV607. Lauda Jerusalem, RV609. Magnificat, RV610a

Le Concert Spirituel / Hervé Niquet

Alpha © ALPHA222 (51' • DDD • T/t)



Vivaldi was never the *maestro* of the Ospedale della Pietà's *coro* (about

70 musicians), but at different times he provided sacred music for it – such as when Gasparini absconded in 1713. Scholars agreed long ago that it stands to reason the tenor and bass choir parts in the famous *Gloria* were sung by the girls (perhaps the 'basses' transposed their music up an octave), but the majority of recordings avoid grappling with this problem head-on – with the notable exception of Andrew Parrott and the Taverner Choir (Virgin, 1/95^R).

Hervé Niquet never does things on autopilot, and he takes another look at how an all-female performance might sound. The opening ritornello has zippy brio, with some sudden exaggerations in dynamic, especially from the instrumentalists of Le Concert Spirituel, but the all-female choir of 20 (five on each part) sing with plangent sonorities, crisp diction and energetic vigour. Niquet's pacy and warm-blooded direction results in a vibrant performance unlike any other in the vast discography. Solemn choral movements ('Et in terra pax hominibus' and 'Qui tollis peccata mundi') grow from unusually intimate to extrovertly emotional in their supplications, but Niquet's decision to have all the ladies sing the 'solo' parts in massed unison is disconcerting. Maybe an element of bluff lies behind his unsupported generalisation that this 'was very frequently done in Vivaldi's day', but he rightly observes that solo numbers such as 'Laudamus te' acquire 'an exceptional intensity'.

The shorter psalms *Laetatus sum* and *Lauda Jerusalem* are compelling, and Vivaldi's skill at choral counterpoint is manifest in sublime slow choruses ('Et misericordia') in the earliest version of his sole extant *Magnificat*.

David Vickers

'Ariane & Orphée'

'Cantates Baroques françaises'

Courbois Ariane Jacquet de la Guerre Violin

Sonata No 1 Lambert Ombre de mon amant

Marais Suite No 1 - Chaconne Rameau Orphée

Hasnaa Bennani *sop* Ensemble Stravaganza

Muso © MU009 (60' • DDD • T/t)



The myths of Ariadne and Orpheus form the inspiration for Ensemble

Stravaganza's first recording of French Baroque music. The leaders, violinist Domitille Gilon and harpsichordist Thomas Soltani, have been imaginative in their choice and interpretation of chamber works both known and little known, and

their performances should be enjoyed in that spirit.

Rameau's *Orphée* (1721) is a cantata for tenor but is sung here by the mellifluous, French-trained Moroccan soprano Hasnaa Bennani, an artistic decision that will have involved some adjustment of the relationship of the voice and *concertante* instruments (violin and bass viol). Orpheus's central *air gracieux* (tr 4) is accompanied by Baroque guitar and viol, presumably to evoke his lyre.

Lambert, a singer and lutenist patronised by the Précieux, and later the collaborator and father-in-law of Lully, published in 1689 a collection of 60 accompanied *airs de cour*, including the Orphic *Ombre de mon amant*. Lambert himself would have sung it, no doubt infusing it with his exceptional command of poetic declamation.

Jacquet de la Guerre, herself a formidable composer of cantatas, provides the first instrumental work, which for Gilon and Soltani reflects in turn the sleep of Orpheus (tr 13) and the fury of Ariadne (tr 14): the D minor violin sonata from her 1707 collection, which the composer also intended to be performed by harpsichord alone. To accompany the violin and *concertante* viol, Ensemble Stravaganza add theorbo or guitar and harpsichord, which, regrettably, often threaten the ensemble balance. Nevertheless, Gilon leads with authority and panache, treating the slow movements as frameworks on which to improvise lavish ornamentation, and the whole as an instrumental cantata.

They continue with the cantata *Ariane* from Courbois's 1710 collection – which incidentally also includes an *Orphée*. A pair of flutes, accompanied by bass viol and theorbo, provide a lilting *ritournelle* in the first air, though elsewhere it is violin that in this arrangement provides the fireworks in the vengeance aria (tr 18) and gentle pathos of the final *air tendrement*.

In the final track, Marais's extended D major Chaconne, Gilon and Soltani treat the three-voice work as a blueprint for an exploration all the possible instrumental combinations to hand, and in doing so seek to enhance the dramatic potential of the work. Entertaining, if dizzying.

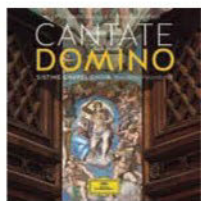
Julie Anne Sadie

'Cantate Domino'

Allegrì Miserere mei, Deus **Anerio** Christus factus est **Lassus** Magnificat octavi toni. Jubilate Deo **Palestrina** Ad te levavi oculos meos. Nunc dimittis (attrib). Super flumina Babylonis. Improprium expectavit cor meum. Adoramus te. Sicut cervus. Angelus Domini descendit de caelo. Constitues eos principes. Tu es Petrus **Victoria** Popule meus

Sistine Chapel Choir / Massimo Palombella

DG ④ 479 5300GH (59' • DDD • T/t)



The Sistine Chapel Choir celebrate their musical heritage through a selection of

Renaissance sacred music recorded inside the Sistine Chapel. Their programme includes works by Palestrina, and Allegri's *Miserere* as preserved in the Sistine Codex of 1661. It is a beautifully recorded disc, as much a celebration of the building as of the music or the voices. They are a large ensemble, 30 *ragazzi* and 20 men with high tenors replacing falsettist-altos, and their performances favour low pitch, resulting in a richer timbre than English counterparts. At times they are reminiscent of Westminster Cathedral Choir under George Malcolm, but the trebles are more rounded.

The director, Monsignor Massimo Palombella, takes a unique approach to polyphony driven partly by the acoustic, which demands slower tempi than smaller professional ensembles favour, and partly through a quest for 'aesthetic relevance'. Interpretatively, this frequently results in the opposite approach to prevailing norms: phrases bulge expressively, surge to their apex and then slink down the other side, there are occasional *abbellimenti* and a 'dynamic' tactus that promotes tempo changes between sections. Such style traits seem to be driven from the top down, with detail often lost among lower voices. Ultimately, it sounds like the shifting affects of Baroque style rather than the graceful architecture of the Renaissance, but it works. Occasionally there are baffling consequences, such as at the *accelerando* in Palestrina's *Super flumina Babylonis* on 'dum recordaremur tui, Sion', but at other times it leads to extreme poignancy, such as the opening of Anerio's *Christus factus est pro nobis*.

Mannered singing may be out of favour among many professional ensembles but here it is executed with such conviction that it creates one of the most expressive and atmospheric recordings of this repertoire in recent years.

Edward Breen

'L'héritage de Petrus Alamire'

Sanctus and Agnus Dei movements from
Anonymous Missa sex vocum N'avez point veu
Champion Missa de Sancta Maria Magdalena
Févin Missa quattuor vocum supra la sol mi fa re
Forestier Missa quinque vocum supra Baises

moy Josquin Missa Malheur me bat Sticheler

Missa Se j'avoye porpoins de veleur

Huelgas Ensemble / Paul Van Nevel

Cypres ④ CYP1673 (75' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at St Paul's Church, Antwerp,

August 19, 2015



The Huelgas Ensemble are no strangers to off-the-wall programmes,

and this one is certainly eccentric – on paper, at least. As the last two movements of the Mass ordinary, the *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei* were quite often paired by composers in the earlier history of polyphonic cycles, but here Paul Van Nevel presents six pairs drawn from Masses that survive complete in manuscripts copied under the direction of the master copyist Petrus Alamire. Most are new to the catalogue, their composers known only to specialists. Sticheler is especially obscure, while Champion and Forestier are perhaps best known as the composers of works formerly thought to be by Josquin. The subject of Robert de Févin's Mass is a nice piece of misdirection, borrowing Josquin's famous *La sol fa re mi* but moving *mi* to third place.

The disc as a whole, then, is placed under the sign of Josquin, who makes an appearance at the end, with his Mass *Malheur me bat*. Van Nevel's choices are self-justifying: this gallery of pseudo-Josquins is remarkable for its quality, not excepting the anonymous Mass *N'avez point veu*. Each individual piece has something to offer, and the whole is suffused with the dream-like quality that currently marks out the Huelgas sound. But this comes at a price: Van Nevel's trademark doublings of the tenor voice by the sopranos (heard most clearly in the 'Pleni' section of Févin's *Sanctus*) make the counterpoint sound even more complex than it is, and one cannot help feel that it does the composers a disservice. You might say that Josquin can cope with such treatment better than most but recordings of this particular Mass are thin on the ground, and with voices this beautiful one wishes that Van Nevel had resisted the urge to gild this particular lily. Frustrating as ever, and yet indispensable.

Fabrice Fitch

'A Wondrous Mystery'

Clemens non Papa Pastores quidnam vidistis. Missa Pastores quidnam vidistis
Eccard Übers Gebirg Maria geht. Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her **Handl** Canite tuba in Sion. Mirabile mysterium **Hassler** Hodie Christus natus est **H Praetorius**

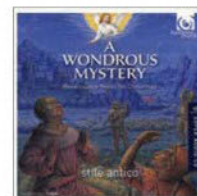
Magnificat quinti toni M Praetorius Ein Kindgeborn in Bethlehem **M Praetorius/Melchior**

Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen

Stile Antico

Harmonia Mundi ④ HMU80 7575

(73' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



This new disc of Renaissance Christmas music from vocal ensemble Stile Antico

offers a cleverly balanced selection of festive Lutheran and Roman Catholic works. Running through their programme is the sumptuous *Missa Pastores quidnam vidistis* by Jacobus Clemens non Papa, and at its centre sits Hieronymus Praetorius's astounding double-choir *Magnificat* with interleaved carols.

The Lutheran works are sung with sprightly and attractive energy: in particular the sopranos sparkle in Melchior Vulpus's delightful canon *Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen*. In contrast, the Catholic polyphony tends towards a calmness that can veer too close to leisurely when compared to such vigorous carols. Stile Antico have a considered, homogeneous sound that is extremely sonically beautiful; however, in Clemens's motet and longer Mass movements in particular (*Gloria* and *Credo*), their ponderous approach can leave one longing for a little more imperative and direction. While individual polyphonic lines are well crafted and expertly sung, the overall effect is the aural equivalent of standing in a snow-globe: phrases gently rise and fall on all sides without an overarching sense of purpose. This is, of course, a very subjective criticism since Stile Antico's approach is perfectly valid and well delivered, yet my preference is for The Tallis Scholars' recording of this Mass, infused as it is with a consistent forward momentum leading to sensational moments of arrival at declamatory passages such as 'chorus angelorum'. There is little such obvious Annunciation wonderment from Stile Antico, yet a few times, when they allow recurring motifs to rise to the foreground, the effect is suddenly much more engaging.

However one prefers polyphony to be sung, there is no denying that this is sure to be a justly popular Christmas choice. It is a smooth and assured album and both the ensemble sound and the individual voices are extremely attractive. In short: charming but not challenging. **Edward Breen**

Clemens Missa Pastores – selected comparison:

Tallis Scholars, Phillips (12/87) (GIME)

CDGIM013 or CDGIM202

REISSUES

James Jolly celebrates the artistry of Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, **Rob Cowan** revisits Stravinsky as performer and **Peter Quantrill** assesses the Willcocks King's years

A singer of the century

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, who was born 100 years ago on December 9, was one of the great singers of the last century, and an artist whose career meshed perfectly with the 'modern' era of recording. She reached her prime, vocally and interpretatively, just as the industry was embracing first the LP and then stereo; add to that the fact she was married to one of the most visionary of all record producers, Walter Legge, and you realise that she was in exactly the right place at the right time to play a major role in the post-war resurgence of recorded music. She made her first recording for EMI in 1946 and her last in 1974, and in between contributed numerous Lieder, choral and operatic recordings to the catalogue, many of which achieved classic status very soon and have retained it.

To mark Schwarzkopf's centenary, Warner Classics has gathered together all of the song and aria (both opera and operetta) recordings she made for EMI between 1952 and 1974 (the 78s will follow next year). It has reproduced the original sleeves (minus logo) and packaged the 31 discs in a handsome box that sells for somewhere in the region of £45. It is worth pointing out that the original programmes have been retained – no extras to make them up to 'length' – which means that the care that Schwarzkopf and Legge went to in assembling the recitals is respected, so some discs are quite short by modern standards. The accompanying booklet contains essays by three writers, each of whom knew Schwarzkopf: Alan Sanders (in English: typically informed and big on detail), Thomas Voigt (in German, and offering a nicely complementary take) and André Tubeuf (in French, gorgeously Rococo and perfumed).

There's now a knee-jerk critical response to Schwarzkopf's art – 'mannered' is the word that is reached for most often. And yes, her focus on the word could sometimes overburden a simple song, but my goodness, what a lovely freshness she

brought, especially in her early recordings. (I personally find her tendency towards, as Philip Hope-Wallace used to put it in these pages, 'kittenishness' more troubling – a slightly arch quality that strikes a rather artificial note.) Schwarzkopf was an artist who believed in hard work – she famously insisted on putting herself through a gruelling audition for Legge before signing her first contract. She had worked hard to get where she had and she expected her collaborators to be comparably committed to their art. And judging by the pianists and conductors she worked with, those standards were maintained throughout her life. Her pianists on this set include Edwin Fischer, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Walter Gieseking, Gerald Moore (her favourite) and Geoffrey Parsons, each bringing magnificent artistry and revealing musicianship.

The first disc, a Schubert recital with Fischer, is a lesson in communication – every word is crystal clear, the voice wielded with great flexibility and ease of phrasing, and the intelligence behind the singing evident in every phrase, and Fischer's playing is heavenly. Similarly, the chemistry between Schwarzkopf and Gieseking in Mozart is palpable. There are many old favourites here – both recordings of Strauss's *Four Last Songs*, the mono Ackermann fresher of voice, the stereo Szell exquisitely accompanied and lovingly unfolded (and for vinyl fans, available singly as an 180g LP for about £15); the Mozart/Strauss songs and concert arias (Brendel/Szell) and the *Knaben Wunderhorn* (Szell again and with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, who also joins Schwarzkopf for Wolf's *Italian Songbook* and Brahms's *Deutsche Volkslieder* – two kindred spirits when it came to Lieder singing). In song, Schwarzkopf was a great Wolf interpreter, bringing out the essence of these mini dramas; the 1953 Salzburg recital with Furtwängler at the keyboard is a real event, and she is in terrific voice.

There are some lovely song programmes – the two 'Songs You Love' albums, very



A glorious centenary memento of Schwarzkopf's art

cleverly assembled and done with great charm (though on the 'Christmas Album', conducted by Charles Mackerras, I've never heard *I saw three ships* done at such a lick). Charm also sparkles from every bar of the Ackermann-accompanied operetta album and the *Arabella* excerpts, conducted by the estimable Lovro von Matačić, are a joy. The duets with Irmgard Seefried, taking in Carissimi and Monteverdi as well as Dvořák, find two singers in perfect accord and really working off each other.

Though Schwarzkopf tended to focus on the Austro-German repertoire, she sang a fair amount of Italian repertoire and 'Favourite Scenes and Arias' contains a delightful 'O mio babbino caro', a heart-melting 'Sì, mi chiamano Mimi' and the Willow Song and 'Ave Maria' from *Otello*. (And one shouldn't forget that she was Liù to Callas's Turandot.) Her 1952 Mozart recital, with John Pritchard conducting, is wonderfully varied, though I find her a little too knowing as Zerlina. William Walton wrote the part of Cressida in his opera for Schwarzkopf, and though she never performed it onstage, she recorded excerpts under Walton's baton in 1956 – the results are glorious and Schwarzkopf characterises with total conviction and astounding beauty of tone.

A wonderful memento of a great singer, lovingly presented and in the superbly remastered sound we've come to expect from these splendid boxes.

James Jolly

THE RECORDINGS

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf

'The Complete Recitals 1952-1974'

Warner Classics © (31 discs) 2564 60260-5

R Strauss Orchestral Songs

Schwarzkopf; Berlin RSO / George Szell

Warner Classics © ● 2564 60496-4

Stravinsky by Stravinsky

In a perceptive and persuasive essay that accompanies this magnificent collection, the American musicologist and critic Richard Taruskin reminds us that for Stravinsky (and here I follow Taruskin's example by quoting the composer himself), musical execution 'implied the strict putting into effect of an explicit will that contains nothing beyond what it specifically commands'. Anything beyond that is 'interpretation', and therein lies, according to Stravinsky, a frequent source of error – Stokowski, Ansermet and Koussevitzky, without whom Stravinsky would have been far less popular than he was, being prominent targets for criticism. There is, however, an implied contradiction here: if elements of interpretation don't alter from one Stravinsky performance to another, then **The Complete Columbia Album Collection**, with its many first-time commercial reissues of earlier mono recordings (for RCA as well as for CBS) of works that Stravinsky remade in stereo, would prove surplus to requirements. Happily that is far from the case.

Stravinsky's performances, although by and large fired straight from the hip with little if any sign of mannerism or affectation, do differ in detail, due largely to the contrasting approaches of collaborating musicians who, even when adopting the recommended tempi and dynamics, are often quite unlike. Take the 1950 RCA recording of *Apollon musagète*, never to my knowledge transferred locally to CD before. For the solo violin-writing, the familiar CBS stereo recording features a refined violinist who sounds to me like Israel Baker (he or she remains unacknowledged), the RCA version a much more intensely expressive John Corigliano. The two readings of the Coda sound quite different, the earlier, more drily recorded version doggedly emphatic, providing quite a contrast with its lighter, gently swinging successor (part of which you can also hear in rehearsal). And who could forget Marni Nixon's magical account of the *Two Balmont Songs*, as touching and tonally pure as any singing on disc from the period? Evelyn Lear on the later recording is also excellent but not quite in Nixon's exalted class. Then there's the riveting, Schoenbergian Septet, the closing Gigue rather more focused, rhythmically, than in the stereo remake. A third version, which is better than either, is included as part of 'Tashi plays Stravinsky', an unexpected

bonus that includes music/arrangements not featured in the original CBS series.

Of course, performance-wise, plenty of 'A/B' similarities present themselves throughout the set, the two recordings of the complete *Pulcinella* ballet being a case in point (try comparing the two finales). And there are the various bonuses that you won't necessarily know about unless you purchase the collection or sneak a glance at the 262-page hardback book. This being an 'original jacket'-style collection, where the original LP also included material not by Stravinsky, you get that too. For example, the Vronsky and Babin programme that features, as its main item, a sparkling performance of the Concerto for two solo pianos (plus the *Tango* and *Scherzo à la russe*) also includes music by Rimsky-Korsakov, Babin and Arensky. Even more valuable is the *Duo concertant* with violinist Joseph Szigeti, as intimate and deeply expressive a performance as you're ever likely to hear, where Stravinsky himself is at the piano, coupled with the droll *Pastorale* (Stravinsky conducts), and sitting between them Bloch's *Baal Shem* Suite for which Szigeti is partnered by Andor Foldes (then Andor Farkas), another heartfelt performance.

The invaluable presence of Stravinsky's trusty assistant, advisor and friend, the conductor and scholar Robert Craft (see obituary on page 133), guarantees a minimum of executant excellence even on the composer's final recordings, not to mention the various performances led by Craft himself. You'll encounter a CD devoted almost entirely to the music of Gesualdo (Craft conducts), with Stravinsky's *Monumentum pro Gesualdo di Venosa* (under Stravinsky himself). Craft again takes charge for two differently orchestrated versions of *Les noces*, neither of them at all familiar, the second scored for solo voices, chorus, pianolas, two cimbaloms, harmonium and percussion.

I'm tempted to posit a general rule when comparing 'middle' and 'later' Stravinsky recordings (the 'earlier' material, most of it owned by EMI/Warner, is pre-war) that the older performances, or many of them, are especially dramatic and incisive (I cite the mono *Petrushka* Suite), marginally more spontaneous too. Other major differences greet the big vocal works, *Oedipus Rex* and *The Rake's Progress*, with their very different casts and singing styles, and the two versions of the *Ebony Concerto*, the whisky sounding Woody Herman recording, now brought fully in your face, more



aggressively uptight than the famous (and infinitely better recorded) Benny Goodman/Columbia Jazz Combo classic, where the Bernstein, Copland and Morton Gould items, all part of the original 'Meeting at the Summit' package, are included. But there are exceptions: the two versions of the Symphony in C (from Cleveland and Toronto respectively), for example, where the earlier Cleveland option is marginally more relaxed, though the coupling, the first recording of the 1952 Cantata with Hugues Cuénod and Jennie Tourel, is wonderful.

The set is completed with an absorbing and in some respects revelatory DVD documentary, *Stravinsky in Hollywood*, where Craft's presence looms large and the relationship with Schoenberg's atonal work is especially interesting, even moving, Stravinsky's late conversion assuming almost religious proportions. Transfers are as a rule superb and so is the presentation, to the extent that the printed spines are extremely clear and the original liner-notes, reproduced exactly as they were on the LPs, are perfectly readable, at least with a good magnifying glass. Just make sure that you check with the book for added bonuses, which occasionally aren't listed on the original-artwork sleeves. Forget the previous 22-disc 'Igor Stravinsky Edition' (7/91): it's not a patch on this.

If there's any validity to the idea of musical truth, then this set brings you Stravinsky's truth more or less unexpurgated, albeit with fascinating and subtly differing shadows that distinguish this or that alternative recorded performance. Or should I say interpretation?

Rob Cowan

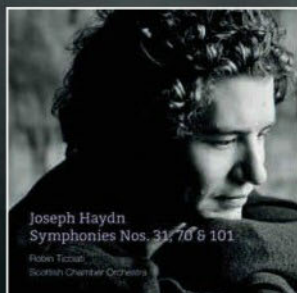
THE RECORDING

Stravinsky The Complete Columbia Album Collection **Stravinsky et al**
Sony Classical © (57 discs) 88875 02616-2

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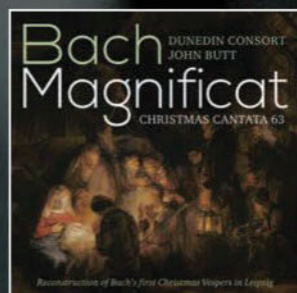


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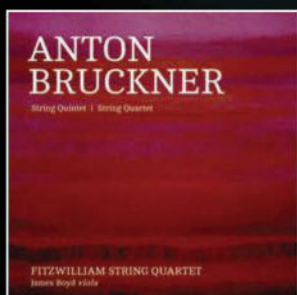


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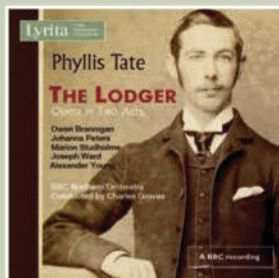
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Opera Sets



REAM 2119

The Lodger Phyllis Tate

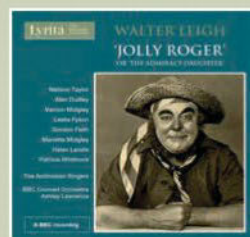
The Lodger forms part of a select group of British stage works with a horrific or supernatural theme. The composer's natural gift for extended, lyrical lines & her capacity to build & dispel tension assist in lending distinction to an atmospheric and cogently constructed piece of music theatre.



SRCD 2350

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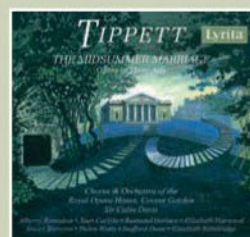
Michael Hurd is perhaps best known for his writings on British composers and his 'light' works for young musicians. This set, however, presents two works by a composer wholly dedicated to his craft and worthy of exploration.



REAM 2116

'Jolly Roger' Walter Leigh

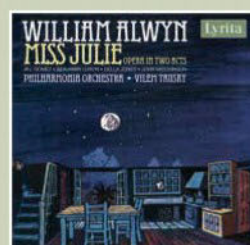
The 'Jolly Roger' by Walter Leigh is a comic opera in 3 acts. Its seagulls, splashes of water and pirate accents make it something of a period piece in its own right. Nonetheless, it is the deftness and allure of Leigh's music that makes the strongest impression.



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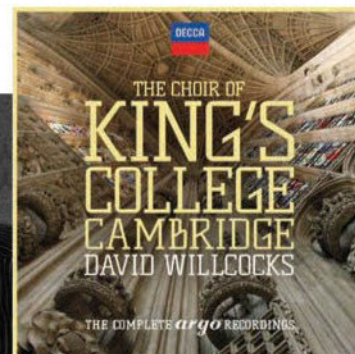
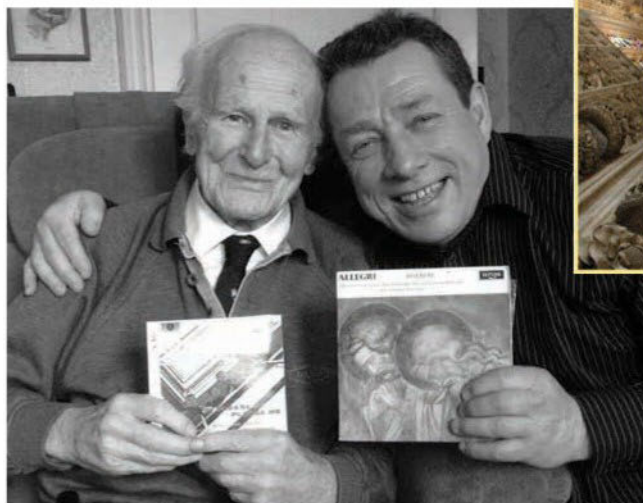
A glorious era remembered

Early in the new millennium, Salman Rushdie claimed a religious value for the novel as the totemic art in a post-religious age: 'The idea of the sacred is quite simply one of the most conservative notions in any culture, because it seeks to turn other ideas – Uncertainty, Progress, Change – into crimes.' Rushdie continued by quoting the British surrealist Herbert Read. 'Art is never transfixed. Change is the condition of art remaining art.'

If any musical institution resists Rushdie's argument it would seem to be The Choir of King's College Cambridge, less through the theoretical force of proposals to be debated in its senior common room and more by the daily assertion of values – as distinct from Rushdie's ideas – which have come to embody the English Choral Tradition. **The Complete Argo Recordings** spans 1954–73, from the end of Boris Ord's tenure as Director of Music to halfway through the David Willcocks era (when the choir's recording allegiance switched from Decca/Argo to EMI).

Like a magazine, the box is best 'read' by turning to the back, then the front, then pulling out what you fancy in the middle. Extract disc 28 for the dawn of the post-war King's style, Evensong under Ord including everything but hymns, and one of several recordings new to CD. What first you hear is a treble entry to Batten's *O praise the Lord* of greater conviction than precision, but then the drive towards executive perfection has always been overstated with King's (one of many similarities with Karajan's Berlin Philharmonic) and does them a disservice by neglecting the voice-leading, which crackles with electricity like the high-voltage lines suspended from a pylon. Such tension and urgency of purpose is even more evident in the singing of Psalms 126–29. The *Magnificat* of Stanford in G is graced with a treble solo of perhaps unmatched purity and fragility from Richard White, who is rightly singled out in one of the booklet's excellent essays. This Evensong of dreams continues with the Smith Responses and Stone Lord's Prayer (both uncredited in the track list, which entertains some peculiar ideas about orthography: the Stanford listing gives all manner of useless information but omits the key, while text from Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer is credited to 'Anon').

Here is the performing style that set the standard for hundreds of ensembles thereafter, 'the embodiment of an ideal



Sir David Willcocks with Roy Goodman, the treble soloist on the 1963 recording of the Allegri *Miserere*, 50 years on. Goodman holds the original EP, and Willcocks the CD of The Beatles' album 'Please, Please Me', also from 1963

Here is the performing style that set the standard for hundreds of ensembles

of perfection', as John Rutter remarks in the booklet. Did the ideal calcify over the years? Like Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic, King's and Willcocks became victims of their own success through the exploitation of a market that sought reliability and 'library choices'. However, unlike Karajan, Willcocks was making first and not tenth recordings of what is now standard repertoire, due significantly to his efforts. Taverner's *Western Wind* Mass was a personal favourite of Willcocks. The Byrd and Tallis discs have lost none of their finesse over the years, even if serenity is now a quality less prized than vigour. Two Masses of Tye sound especially fine. Compared with Ledger's later recording for EMI, the intonation is more sprightly, the structure more surely felt, the trebles brighter despite being more closely recorded.

It is in the Baroque repertoire of Bach, Handel, Vivaldi and Pergolesi that the collection most betrays its age. The quicker pace of harmonic change and denser textures are more susceptible to the chapel's six-second echo, for all the skill of Kenneth Wilkinson and his Decca colleagues. Solo singers rarely sound comfortable in King's under studio conditions, perhaps conscious of the difference in vocal production between them and the choir behind them. In six of Handel's *Chandos Anthems*, Ian Partridge, April Cantelo and others make neat and contained contributions, at odds with what we understand today as the freedom Handel gave to his singers to ornament and dramatise a line, even in the

context of sacred or chamber-scale works. Willcocks's *Nelson* Mass is fired by the enthusiasm still evident when he led the piece in an 80th birthday concert.

My own highlight is disc 12: a magnificently austere, unaccompanied Evensong for Ash Wednesday including a Puritan Evening Service by Thomas Causton, but also Purcell's *Hear my prayer* sung with such frank emotion and steadily accumulating power as would have Calvin storming out of the chapel before he could hear Allegri's *Miserere*, sung in English, and of which Roger Fiske could write in *Gramophone* – just 50 years ago – that 'this is a work far more often read about than heard', before, inevitably, dwelling on the 'exquisite and unforgettable' high Cs of Roy Goodman's treble.

But this set is about so much more than the music. To hear George 'Dadie' Rylands read 'The shepherds go to the manger', and Willcocks himself 'The Prodigal Son' for Ash Wednesday (and behind him the Austins and E-Types buzzing down King's Parade); to see Roy Goodman in rugby kit as well as surplice, to learn from Rutter (former Director of Music at Clare) and Ronald Corp of what the King's tradition meant to later curators of English choral music. These are all far from incidental joys in what is inevitably a throwback to an era without 'Chapel chill-out sessions' in which (according to King's website) students recline on beanbags strewn across the chapel floor, though not, I dare say, during Evensong. Some things are still sacred. **G**

Peter Quantrill

THE RECORDING

The Complete Argo Recordings Choir of King's College, Cambridge / David Willcocks
Decca © (29 discs) 478 8918DC29

Opera



Hugo Shirley welcomes a powerful new Frau ohne Schatten:

'What binds it all together so compellingly is Weigle's conducting, and the fabulous playing of his orchestra.' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 97**



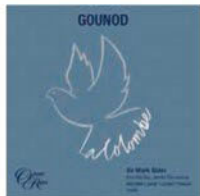
Tim Ashley on Max Emanuel Cencic's Arie napoletane:

'Flamboyance and intelligence don't always go hand in hand, though Cencic possesses both qualities in spades.' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 101**

Gounod

La colombe

Erin Morley *sop* Sylvie
Javier Camarena *ten* Horace
Michèle Losier *mez* Mazet
Laurent Naouri *bass-bar* Maître Jean
Hallé Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder
 Opera Rara © 2 ORC53 (80' • DDD • S/T/t)



You come at Gounod's *La colombe* ('The Dove') thinking that the bird of the

title will turn out to be the MacGuffin, and that the plot will really revolve around something less featherweight. It doesn't, perhaps because Gounod's 1860 *opéra-comique* was composed as filler for well-heeled Baden-Baden patrons who had been denied the composer's *Philémon et Baucis*, pinched by the Théâtre-Lyrique in Paris in the sunburst of fame that followed *Faust* in 1859.

Star wattage remained high for *La colombe*, even if this was a substitute. Gounod could draw on a libretto by Carré and Barbier (*Faust*, *Les contes d'Hoffmann*); his leading lady, Caroline Miolan-Carvalho, was also the first Marguerite in *Faust* (and would go on to sing Juliette in *Romeo et Juliette*); and Emile Balanqué, the original Méphistophélès, took on the part of Maître Jean.

Lyrical and gently melodic though the score may be, the opera has no numbers that are wildly memorable. Its chief pleasure is how sweetly Gounod writes for his quartet of singers, while scene-setting instrumental numbers have ephemeral delicacy. That the opera has been neglected is partly down to its particular combination of speech and song – this is not so much operetta as character comedy in which performers well-versed in the style would have carried most of the burden. It's also hard to see how the convoluted story (even at 80 minutes) of the impoverished Horace and his passion for the two Sylvies in his life – one is a dove, one a Countess who desires her avian counterpart

so that she can challenge another lady with a talented parrot – could fire up the stage.

Yet I can't give Opera Rara's affectionate recording the bird. Mark Elder conducts a nimble Hallé with lovely, lively affection, and if there is no salt available to balance the sweetness, he keeps things moving with unobtrusive stealth. The two French singers who play the sidekicks, mezzo-soprano Michèle Losier as woman-hating Mazet and Laurent Naouri as Maître Jean, field the dialogue (edited down by Rodney Milnes and Agathe Mélinand) with the most *savoir faire* and add a sense of improvisation to their numbers. Erin Morley lacks an ounce of honey in her tone as Sylvie but sings with agile coloratura and brings an appropriately grand manner to her brief yet impactful lament in Act 2. If you can have audible puppydog eyes, tenor Javier Camarena's Horace manages it, sweetly denying himself everything – even the blasted dove – in pursuit of his great love. The opera ends with the revelation that the parrot, not the dove, has snuffed it, a Pythonesque twist – and enough to persuade us that Gounod has pulled off (at least for most opera-goers today) Something Completely Different. **Neil Fisher**

Mozart

La clemenza di Tito – Deh, se piacer mi vuoi; Ecco il punto, o Vitellia...Non più di fiori. **Don Giovanni** – In quali eccessi, o Numi...Mi tradi quell'alma ingrata. **Idomeneo** – Oh smania! Oh Furie!...D'Oreste, d'Aiace; Solitudini amiche... Zeffiretti lusinghieri. **Le nozze di Figaro** – E Susanna non vien!...Dove sono i bei momenti; Porgi amor, qualche ristoro. *Bella mia fiamma, addio!...Resta, oh cara, K528*

Dorothea Röschmann *sop* Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra / Daniel Harding
 Sony Classical © 88875 06126-2 (57' • DDD • T/t)



Dorothea Röschmann has sung all the Mozart roles represented here at

either the Vienna Staatsoper, the Metropolitan Opera, or both. With one exception, she brings a subtle dramatic understanding to each of these women and, where apt, lives them with no-holds-barred intensity. Her voice, darker, more 'hooded' than a decade ago, is not conventionally beautiful. If you seek elegance of execution in the notoriously taxing scales and arpeggios of Elvira's 'Mi tradi', then look elsewhere – say, to Sena Jurinac or Soile Isokoski. But Röschmann turns the slight edge on her tone to advantage in a performance that mingles tenderness, fire and neurotic obsessiveness. Despite a rather deliberate tempo, Elettra's 'mad scene' in *Idomeneo* exudes both fury and a desolate, broken grandeur, epitomised by her colouring of the repeated 'dolore'. I don't hear much feminine seductiveness as Vitellia reduces Sesto to jelly in 'Deh, se piacer mi vuoi'. Yet Röschmann leaves you in no doubt – not least with her formidable chest tones – of the would-be Empress's ruthlessness and overweening pride.

While she always excels when portraying extreme emotional states, grace and tranquillity do not fall easily within her expressive orbit. The one real disappointment here is Ilia's song to the breezes, 'Zeffiretti lusinghieri' – a crucial oasis of serenity in the opera – where the tempo feels heavy, the style effortful. In 'Porgi amor' and the opening section of 'Dove sono', both cruel tests of intonation, Röschmann tends to sing slightly under the note, though in compensation she evidently feels the Countess's predicament deeply, and phrases and colours with eloquence. Under Daniel Harding, the Swedish orchestra provides incisive, rhythmically alert accompaniments, with more than a nod to period performance practice.

Most impressive of all are the two final tracks, the (partially) chastened Vitellia's scena of remorse, where Röschmann triumphantly scales the music's fearful heights and depths (beautiful playing from the claret-toned basset-horn here), and one of Mozart's most penetrating concert



Much more than sheer spectacle: Peter Stein's production of Verdi's *Aida* for La Scala (review on page 99)

arias, *Bella mia fiamma*. Mozart wrote this for the Prague soprano Josepha Duschek, who allegedly locked him in her summer house until he'd finished it. Mozart retaliated by insisting that she sight-read it, having slyly inserted some of the most tortuous progressions he ever wrote. Röschmann flawlessly negotiates the chromatic minefields and brings a moving humanity to this scene of a man awaiting his death, culminating in a climax of terrifying desperation. **Richard Wigmore**

Ravel

L'enfant et les sortilèges

Hélène Hébrard *soprano* L'Enfant
Delphine Galou *contralto*
 Maman/La Libellule/La Tasse Chinoise
Julie Pasturaud *mezzo-soprano*
 La Bergère/La Chatte/L'Ecureuil/Un Pâtre
Jean-Paul Fouchécourt *tenor*
 La Thière/Le Petit Vieillard/La Rainette
Marc Barrard *baritone* L'Horloge Comtoise/Le Chat
Nicolas Courjal *bass* La Fauteuil/Un Arbre
Ingrid Perruche *soprano*
 La Chauve-souris/La Chouette/Une Pastourelle
Annick Massis *soprano*
 Le Feu/La Princesse/Le Rossignol
Choeur Britten; Jeune Choeur Symphonique;
Maitrise of Lyon National Opera

Ma Mère l'Oye

Lyon National Orchestra / Leonard Slatkin
 Naxos © 8 660336 (72' • DDD • S)



Here is that odious Child again, recorded in 2013, a few months before the recently issued live performance conducted by Seiji Ozawa. The Orchestre National de Lyon is not an opera-house orchestra, but under Music Director Leonard Slatkin they play Ravel's glittering score to the manner born. The many fine soloists include oboes who breathe as one at the opening, and a pleasingly woody flute whose dialogue with the Princess is a high spot; not to mention the orchestral pianist, whose coruscating playing illustrates the Child's tantrum when the Mother leaves him to reflect on his behaviour.

Colette's *fantaisie lyrique* is in two parts. In his room, familiar objects that the Child has damaged come to life to confront him; then the action moves to the garden, where he is set upon by the animals that he has abused. In the end he

shows compassion, whereupon the animals forgive him. Hélène Hébrard characterises the Child vividly; but the interval of a fourth, sequential or combined, is an important feature of the opera, so it's a pity that her cry of 'Maman!' before the animals fall on her is imprecisely pitched.

Like Hébrard, the rest of the cast are native French speakers. It might be facile to equate this with being idiomatic, but to my ears they all sound just right. Jean-Paul Fouchécourt, who is also on the Ozawa and Rattle recordings, is a splendidly manic Petit Vieillard ('Arithmetic'). Annick Massis, more luxury casting, eschews the trill at 'Gare à toi!' but is otherwise brilliantly fluent in Le Feu's coloratura. Of the others, Delphine Galou – a real contralto – is especially notable.

In the complete ballet version of *Ma Mère l'Oye*, recorded back in 2011, Slatkin and his orchestra are on top form: beautiful solo strings in the Prelude and a deft account of the Dance of the Spinning Wheel. This disc is a terrific bargain.

Richard Lawrence

Selected comparisons:

BPO, Rattle (6/09) (EMI) 264197-2

Saito Kinen Orch, Ozawa (9/15) (DECC) 478 6760DHO



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R Strauss



Elektra

Ingela Brimberg *sop* Elektra
Ingrid Tobiasson *mez* Klytemnestra
Susanna Levonen *sop* Chrysothemis
Magnus Kyle *ten* Aegisthus
Thomas Lander *bar* Orestes
Norrländ Opera Symphony Orchestra / Rumon Gamba

Stage director **Carlus Padrissa**

Video director **Robin Hofwander**

C Major Entertainment © DVD 731808;

© 731904 (108' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O • S)

Recorded live 2014



This new issue enters a crowded field but on paper has some unusual characteristics to

distinguish it. First is the venue, a vast outdoor space in Umeå, north Sweden; second is the production by La Fura dels Baus, which takes full advantage of that space. In many ways it's a spectacular show. Copious amounts of blood-like liquid spill out into a kind of moat that surrounds a vast, primitive figure barely perceivable on the ground, its eyes lit, its face the site of most of the action. I say most, for some of it is transferred into enormous puppets into whose chests the principals plonk themselves. The first of these, which I initially took to be an apparition of Agamemnon himself, appears during Elektra's cries to her father, but she has climbed into it herself by the end of the Monologue. Then Chrysothemis appears in hers. Then Klytemnestra arrives in hers, in this case something akin to a supersize Dalek, bedecked with gesticulating extras in full lycra bodysuits, who then descend with her to form a writhing human train.

But beyond the spectacle, which doesn't always transfer to the small screen, the production doesn't have a great deal to say, or, it seems, much interest in the piece itself. It's a generalised response to a complex work which sees it simply as a gore-fest. The general aesthetic is a mess, too, with the familiar Fura dels Baus mixture of the primitive and the futuristic throwing up plenty of preposterous costumes. Elektra is burdened with a sort of umbilical cord throughout, which she severs with the axe at the close; Orestes resembles a futuristic building-site foreman; Aegisthus enters in a vintage motor car.

The musical performance is probably best characterised as heroic in the circumstances. The exception is Ingela Brimberg's Elektra: the voice lacks a steely

edge and – as far as one can tell – volume, but she gets through the role unscathed, turning in a touching Recognition Scene, during which she and Orestes are finally left to their own devices. The other principals are serviceable but overparted. Ramon Gamba conducts with a sure touch and the Norrlandsoperan's Symphony Orchestra play securely from wherever they're secreted – it's not entirely clear.

One for the curious, then, but it certainly doesn't dislodge Evelyn Herlitzius from Aix or Irène Theorin in Nikolaus Lehnhoff's fiercely pessimistic Salzburg production. This might have been one case, too, where for once a 'making-of' could really have added something. **Hugo Shirley**

Selected comparisons:

Salonen (9/14) (BELA) DVD BAC110; BAC410

Gatti (ARTH) DVD 101 559; 101 560

R Strauss

Die Frau ohne Schatten

Burkhard Fritz *ten* Emperor
Tamara Wilson *sop* Empress
Sabine Hogrefe *sop* Barak's Wife
Terje Stensvold *bar* Barak
Tanja Ariane Baumgartner *mez* Nurse
Dietrich Volle *bar* Spirit Messenger

Chorus of Frankfurt Opera; Frankfurt Opera

and Museum Orchestra / Sebastian Weigle

Oehms © 3 OC964 (3h 13' • DDD • S/T)

Recorded live, October & November 2014



The Strauss anniversary year might have offered a fair number of

performances to keep *FroSch*-fanciers happy, but not much of it has been preserved. We're to be denied two major stagines that might have made it on to DVD – the Royal Opera's La Scala co-production and Krzysztof Warlikowski's in Munich, conducted by Kirill Petrenko. The former wasn't even filmed, while the release of the latter has been postponed indefinitely. And I have to say that on picking up this new Oehms set from Frankfurt I feared it would offer scant consolation. On paper it might not look that exciting, cast-wise; and then there's Oehms's continued reluctance to provide translations to the librettos they print in their booklets. I had also primed myself to have to put up with the standard theatrical cuts; I am delighted, though, to report that the score (including Act 3's melodrama) is delivered in full – a major plus.

Oehms's sound nevertheless has some of the same problems encountered in its previous Frankfurt releases, with some

IN THE STUDIO

An inside view of who's before the mics and what they're recording

• NMC portrait

The new music label NMC has recorded a disc of works by **Mark Simpson** at Menuhin Hall, Surrey, featuring Simpson himself on clarinet, cellists **Guy Johnston** and **Leonard Elschenbroich**, the **Mercury Quartet**, pianist **Richard Uttley**, and **Ensemble 10-10** conducted by **Clark Rundell**. The album will be released in May 2016.

• HM's Heath and Handel

The **Heath Quartet** (pictured) has chosen Tchaikovsky's String Quartets Nos 1 and 3 for its debut disc on Harmonia Mundi. The group recorded the works this month and the disc is scheduled for worldwide release in November next year. The **Akademie für Alte Musik** has also been in the studio for HM, recording Handel's *Water Music* in the Teldex Studios, Berlin, for a disc scheduled for release in February.



• The Cardinal's Spem in alium

November saw **Andrew Carwood** and **The Cardinal's Musick** record another programme for their ongoing – and award-winning – Tallis survey on Hyperion. The new disc, due for release in late 2016, features *Spem in alium* among other works.

• BIS news

Violinist **Vadim Gluzman** has recorded the Brahms Violin Concerto with the **Lucerne Symphony Orchestra** under **James Gaffigan**. The album will also include the First Violin Sonata (recorded earlier with **Angela Joffe**). **Masaaki Suzuki** has been recording Mozart with his **Bach Collegium Japan** and soloists **Carolyn Sampson**, **Olivia Vermeulen**, **Makoto Sakurada** and **Christian Immier**. The repertoire is the C minor Mass, *Exsultate jubilate* and the *Spatzenmesse*, K220.



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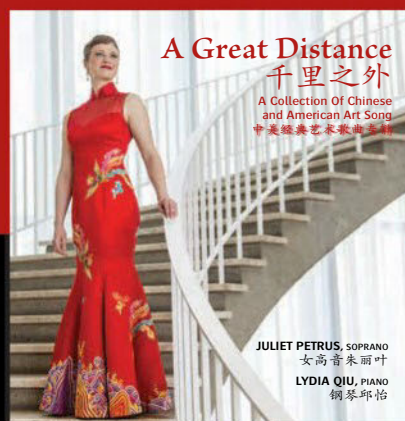
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Sabine Hogrefe sings the Dyer's Wife in a new live recording of Richard Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten* from Frankfurt

voices especially put at a disadvantage from being closely miked, without much acoustic air around them. Terje Stensvold's Barak probably suffers most in this regard, and it's undeniable that the veteran baritone – bidding farewell to the house in this run of performances – sounds dry and a bit crumbly, vocally speaking, even if he still communicates nobility and humanity. Burkhard Fritz's Emperor is also more workmanlike than rousing heroic, although he sings with admirable security.

At the other end of the vocal spectrum, however, things are often outstanding. Tamara Wilson is in ringingly clear, gleaming voice as the Empress, on top of all the notes right from the tricky bird-like twiddles in her first appearance to the fearsome top D flat in her big Act 2 scene, unleashed with thrilling power and accuracy. Above all, she movingly communicates the necessary sense of burgeoning humanity as the character develops throughout the opera. Tanja Ariane Baumgartner makes a vivid Amme, and Sabine Hogrefe, although a touch unwieldy in her vibrato, sings powerfully as the Wife. There are some fine further contributions from the large cast, even if the balancing is unkind to the Voices of the Unborn Children.

What binds it all together so compellingly, though, is the conducting of Sebastian Weigle, and the fabulous playing of his orchestra. Weigle is not one to dawdle, but has a Böhm-like ability to keep things moving without the sense of impatience that Solti brings to the score in his lavish studio set. He communicates the power of the work as drama, and the pacing of the Emperor's and Empress's scenes in Act 2 is especially effective, while the great orchestral interludes are thrilling and moving by turns. The recording also captures the orchestra well: it sounds transparent and light on its feet in a way that emphasises less the lavish resources the work calls for than the economy and intelligence with which Strauss in fact employs them. The lack of libretto translation and some vocal raggedness will disqualify the set as a first choice – and those wanting studio sound will probably opt for Sawallisch's EMI set, the only other uncut CD version besides the Solti – but this new set adds up, the more one listens, to a genuinely compelling dramatic experience. Admirers of this opera will not want to be without it. **Hugo Shirley**

Selected comparisons:

Sawallisch (9/88⁸) (EMI) 088211-2

Solti (5/92) (DECC) 436 243-2DHO3

Verdi



Aida

Kristin Lewis *sop* Aida
Fabio Sartori *ten* Radamès
Anita Rachvelishvili *mez* Amneris
George Gagnidze *bar* Amonasro
Matti Salminen *bass* Ramfis
Carlo Colombara *bass* King of Egypt
Chiara Isotton *sop* Priestess
Azer Rza-Zada *ten* Messenger
Chorus and Orchestra of La Scala, Milan / Zubin Mehta

Stage director **Peter Stein**

Video director **Tiziano Mancini**

C Major Entertainment © **DVD** 732208;

© **Blu-ray** 732304 (151' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HA MA5.1, DTS5.1 & DD stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live 2015



Opera houses are on a hiding to nothing when staging Verdi's *Aida*.

Audiences crave the sort of spectacle usually reserved for arena opera, with a cast of thousands. The Metropolitan Opera's lavish production is a notable exception...as was La Scala's 2006 staging by Franco Zeffirelli. The Italian director was less than impressed when his production was sold off to

Kazakhstan, to be replaced by this new version from Peter Stein.

Stein's *Aida* is almost deliberately anti-Zeffirellian, eschewing pomp. Ferdinand Wögerbauer's simplistic black box set features cutaway geometric shapes to represent temple and tomb, a golden disc descending into the Temple of Vulcan and a golden backcloth for the Triumphal Scene. Nanà Cecchi's costumes are Ancient Egypt-meets-*Star Trek*, with priests in sci-fi skullcaps. Given the veiled priestesses' aimless twirling and the gyrating children costumed as Ethiopian slaves in Amneris's chamber, it's probably a good job the main ballet in the Triumphal Scene is excised. The production looks cheap and provincial, which is not what you expect from Italy's leading opera house.

But *Aida* is about much more than sheer spectacle, and this is where Stein succeeds, focusing effectively on the private moments. He is helped by Zubin Mehta's sensitive conducting and Kristin Lewis as a believable Aida, beautifully acting the vulnerable slave. Vocally, she is less than ideal. Her creamy, Freni-like timbre is most attractive but the middle of her voice lacks weight – more lyric rather than *spinto* soprano – and she becomes strained at the top.

Her Radamès, Fabio Sartori, is less believable as her warrior, his stolid stage presence matching his unexciting vocal performance. 'Celeste Aida' is sung without any great poetry. George Gagnidze has the vocal heft for Amonasro but no true sense of Verdian line, and Matti Salminen is woefully underpowered as Ramfis, completely lacking menace as the zealous priest.

The class act here is Anita Rachvelishvili's waspish Amneris, in terrific voice throughout, but especially in the Judgement Scene. In the opera's final moments, Amneris slashes her wrists, blood dripping over the tomb entrance. It makes for a moving ending to an underwhelming evening.

Mark Pullinger

Wagner

'Opera Arias'

Der fliegende Holländer – Overture; Die Frist ist um. **Götterdämmerung** – Siegfried's Funeral March. **Lohengrin** – Prelude, Act 3; Erhebe dich, Genossin meiner Schmach!¹. **Tannhäuser** – Wie Todesahnung. **Die Walküre** – Wotan's Farewell
Evgeny Nikitin *bass-bar* * Michaela Schuster *mez*
Liège Royal Philharmonic Orchestra /
Christian Arming
Naïve Ⓢ V5413 (72' • DDD • T/t)



Evgeny Nikitin is an estimable Wagnerian but is perhaps best known for a

performance that never happened. He was cast to sing the Flying Dutchman at Bayreuth in 2012, only for old photos to emerge of him sporting a 'swastika' tattoo (subsequently covered up) on his chest. He was swiftly replaced in the midst of the sort of media brouhaha that Bayreuth does so well. Now, three years later, we have a chance to sample what might have been, albeit only in the Dutchman's opening monologue, as part of this slightly ramshackle collection of the composer's 'arias' (only two of the seven tracks, three of which are purely orchestral numbers, could reasonably be designated as such).

Nikitin is a charismatic singer with impressive authority, his timbre solid if soft-grained and a little woolly, especially at the top of his range, from E and above. His German also has a pronounced Slavic tinge, most noticeable in his slightly buzzy consonants. Allied to these characteristics is what feels like an occasional lack of dramatic engagement: his 'Die Frist ist um', for example, occasionally sounds disengaged, and when it comes to Wotan's Farewell, he communicates little about the gravity of the situation. 'Der Augen leuchtendes Paar' in the same scene shows that he's not always comfortable singing below *forte* – there are similar problems in the *Lohengrin* extract at 'Du wilde Seherin' (around 13'00") and at the close of a very respectable but hardly ideally comfortable Song to the Evening Star.

The highlight, in fact, is that *Lohengrin* duet, where Nikitin matches the wildness – dramatic as well as, on occasion, vocal – of Michaela Schuster's Ortrud. Christian Arming secures decent playing from the Liège orchestra, whose strong wind section makes up for less than ideally steady violins. But while this disc might offer a decent souvenir of Nikitin in the theatre, it's hardly an essential purchase otherwise.

Hugo Shirley

Wagner

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg

Josef Greindl *bass* Hans Sachs
Karl Schmitt-Walter *bar* Beckmesser
Wolfgang Windgassen *ten* Walther
Elisabeth Grümmer *sop* Eva
Elisabeth Schärtel *contr* Magdalene
Gerhard Stolze *ten* David
Theo Adam *bass-bar* Pogner
Donald Bell *bass-bar* Nightwatchman

Chorus and Orchestra of the Bayreuth Festival /
Hans Knappertsbusch

Orfeo mono Ⓢ ④ C917 154L (4h 40' • ADD)

Recorded live, July 23, 1960



As this performance has been available unofficially for some time, collectors may

already know that 'Kna', the legendary dinosaur of *Ring* cycles and *Parsifal*, copes rather well with the variety of tempi (brisk not excluded) and musical humour required by Wagner's mature comedy. Such information was already available a decade previously when *Meistersinger* became the only complete Wagner (with an experienced cast) that suspicious Decca would allow him to record in the studio, although the approach to tempi and balance is much more conventional there than in this Bayreuth adventure.

There are certainly some surprises here. In Act 3 a good minute is taken off most other maestros' tempi for the Prelude (two off the old Decca recording), a good half-minute from the Quintet. The dances are real funfair stuff, bright and chirrupy, while the philosophical grass certainly doesn't grow under the feet of Greindl's bass Sachs in his two serious monologues. And the adventurous discordances of the Act 2 'riot' music – both when first heard and quoted when Beckmesser revisits Sachs in Act 3 – are clearer (and better delivered) than in many rival versions. That said, the very steady tread at which the whole 'riot' ensemble is launched will not be for everyone – and isn't for everyone onstage on this occasion in terms of pinpoint ensemble. In the middle of all this, Canadian Donald Bell is a subtly amusing Nightwatchman.

Josef Greindl, already established in the Festival's 'baddy' roles, makes the transition to Sachs comfortably. However, he sounds a mite too dark and gruff giving out marching orders for departure for the Festival Meadow, or 'Jerum! Jerum!' – where the comedy of embarrassing Beckmesser overtakes the hints to Eva that Tomlinson (and Hotter and Norman Bailey) work into their performance. Among his fellow masters, Ludwig Weber is entertaining as Kothner sending up the pomposity of the Guild's rules, and Theo Adam is mannered while not inappropriately young as Pogner, but Karl-Schmitt-Walter's Beckmesser comes across as penny-plain and straightforward. Elisabeth Grümmer (on instruction from conductor or stage director?) sounds as if she is trying to sound younger and more

soubrettish than she naturally was – in fact more like Hilde Gueden, Knappertsbusch's first Eva on record. Stolze, without any of the vocal over-acting assumed for his contemporary Decca recordings, is a fluent and natural David. Wolfgang Windgassen's evident intelligence as the hero is unfortunately rarely matched by the beauty of tone one wants from a Walther.

The sound of this latest reissue is adequate for its period and source but it's hardly a revelatory resurrection. The booklet messes up the track-listing of Act 2. *Pace* past reviews of this performance, you may find, this is certainly neither 'the slowest *Meistersinger* ever' nor Knappertsbusch's 'worst ever' Wagner performance. Its main interest remains the curiosity value of hearing him conduct it, but I wonder why Orfeo did not choose the production's 1956 Cluytens/Hotter first night and whether the company will risk the intriguing 1963 Schippers/Silja/Thomas version, Wieland's next Bayreuth opening. **Mike Ashman**

Selected comparison:

Knappertsbusch (DECCA) (10/94) 440 057-2DMO4

'Arie napoletane'

Auletta Harpsichord Concerto in D **Leo** *Demetrio* – Dal suo gentil sembiante. Scipione nelle Spagne – Non fidi al mar che freme. Siface – No, non vedete mai **Pergolesi** *L'olimpiade* – L'infelice in questo stato **Porpora** *Germanico in Germania* – Qual turbine che scende. **Polifemo** – Quel vasto, quel fiero **A** *Scarlatti* *Il Cambise* – Tutto appoggio il mio disegno. **Massimo Puppieno** – Vago mio sole. Il prigioniero fortunato – Miei pensieri. Il Tigrane – Care pupille belle **Vinci** *Eraclea* – In questa mia tempesta

Max Emanuel Cencic *countertenor*

Il Pomo d'Oro / **Maxim Emelyanychev** *hpd*

Decca © 478 8422DH (76' • DDD • T/T)



Flamboyance and intelligence don't always go hand in hand, though Max

Emanuel Cencic possesses both qualities in spades. The photographs accompanying his 'Arie napoletane' album show him reclining on a chaise longue, modelling – the only word one can use – the brocade jackets that have of late become his trademark platform wear. Behind the posing, however, lurks a recital of superb cogency that has claims to being his finest album to date.

He presents us with a survey of Neapolitan Baroque rarities woven into an emotionally coherent sequence that passes from triumph to resignation. He opens with *Ulisse's* victory song from *Porpora's*

Polifemo, but its vaunting assertion and swirling coloratura soon give way to reiterated expressions of doubt, erotic conflict and sullen anger. There are arias of great beauty by **Leonardo Leo** ('Del suo gentil sembiante' from *Demetrio* is exquisite) and bravura showstoppers from **Vinci's** *Eraclea* and **Scarlatti's** *Il Cambise*. The ambiguities, sexual and harmonic, of **Pergolesi's** 'L'infelice in questo stato' from *L'olimpiade* form the disc's centrepiece, but the high point comes towards the end with 'Qual turbine che scende' from **Porpora's** *Germanico in Germania*. A 'rage' aria complete with tempest imagery, its pulsing accompaniment links driving wind and rain with dark psychological obsessions. 'Vago mio sole' from **Scarlatti's** *Massimo Puppieno* follows, terse and stark with continuo accompaniment, after which **Cencic** effectively bows out of his own recital, leaving **Il Pomo d'Oro** and their harpsichordist-conductor **Maxim Emelyanychev** to provide the bravura finale on their own with **Domenico Auletta's** Harpsichord Concerto in D.

Cencic negotiates this complex emotional parabola wonderfully well. This is a great voice, dark in tone, beguiling in its liquidity and finely equalised. His coloratura flows with great ease, stunningly so in the aria from *Eraclea*, though it's the slower numbers, where the long lines are effortlessly sustained and the emotions keenly felt, that make the disc so special. **Il Pomo d'Oro** are on fine form, too, and **Emelyanychev**, volatile, sensuous and keenly intense, is impressive. An exceptional recital, very highly recommended. **Tim Ashley**

'Baroque Divas'

Bononcini *Astianatte* – Spera che questo cor^c
Caldara *Euristeo* – Daranno all'ira mia^a **Gluck**
Iphigénie en Aulide – Ma fille...Jupiter, lance ta foudre!^c *Paride ed Elena* – Le belle immagini d'un dolce amore^b **Hasse** *Artaserse* – Eccomi alfine...
Pallido il sole^d. *Solimano* – Fra quest'ombre^b.
Tigrane – Solca il mar e nel periglio^d **Porta** *Siface* –
Ti parli nel seno speranza ed amore^c **Sarro** *Siroe*
re di Persia – Al torrente che ruina^a **Veracini**
Adriano in Siria – Amor, dover, rispetto^b
Vivaldi *Giustino* – Vedrò con mio diletto^a
Vinci *Astianatte* – Ti calpesto, o crudo amore^d
^a**Romina Basso**, ^b**Vivica Genaux**, ^c**Mary-Ellen Nesi** *mezs*
^d**Sonia Prina** *contr* **Armonia Artena** / **George Petrou**
Decca © 478 8099DH (80' • DDD • T/T)



coily titillating cover. With the odd

exception, the Baroque singers celebrated here are not prima donnas but star castratos, from **Farinelli** and **Caffarelli** downwards. As you'd expect, there are coloratura fireworks aplenty, most extravagantly in an aria by **Veracini** fashioned to showcase **Farinelli's** stupendous virtuosity. Musically, this strikes me as little more than an extended circus trick. Alaskan mezzo **Vivica Genaux** is certainly equal to its faintly grotesque demands, even if the 'long divisions' (and they don't get longer than this) are dispatched with more than a hint of machine-gun autopilot. But I enjoyed without reservation **Genaux's** expressive singing of a lyrical aria for the penitent hero of **Hasse's** *Solimano*, and her tenderness and simplicity in 'Le belle immagini' from **Gluck's** *Paride ed Elena*.

Belonging to a later generation and aesthetic than the other composers on the disc, **Gluck** is the odd man out here, even more so with **Clytemnestra's** scene from his Parisian opera *Iphigénie en Aulide* (the French proscribed castratos as an 'offence against nature'). Still, if her French declamation is hardly idiomatic, **Mary-Ellen Nesi** impresses here with singing of almost unhinged fury. Of the three mezzos, **Nesi** has the brightest edge to her tone, and is heard to splendid effect baying for vengeance in a coloratura aria for **Faustina Bordoni** from **Bononcini's** *Astianatte* – the opera in which **Bordoni** and her soprano rival **Cuzzoni** scandalised London with their fisticuffs. It's frustrating that the rather rambling booklet-note gives no context for this or any other of the arias – a serious blot on Decca's production.

Although some of her music sounds a shade low for her, **Romina Basso** brings warm, smooth tone and immaculately even coloratura in arias from **Vivaldi's** *Giustino* (where her *da capo* embellishments are a model of heightened expressiveness) and *Siroe* by the obscure **Domenico Natale Sarro**. **Sonia Prina** is the one singer billed as a contralto, and shows why in arias by **Hasse** and **Vinci** composed for the castrato **Nicolò Grimaldi**. In the gloomy **Hasse** aria, **Prina** conveys horror and remorse with a numb, blanched tone, while **Vinci's** aria of triumph, with priapic horns, elicits a trumpeting swagger. All the while **George Petrou** directs his Athens-based period band with terrific pizzazz, unafraid to go over the top in music that is so often about excess. **Richard Wigmore**

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REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

Memorable maestros celebrated

Markevitch, Martinon, Stokowski and Munch live again in a group of appealing reissues

Two of the most respected conductors of the last century are the subject of Warner and Erato's latest Icon box-sets: **Igor Markevitch** and **Jean Martinon**. In a sympathetic and informative booklet-note, Jon Tolansky quotes Bartók, who considered Markevitch 'the most striking personality in contemporary music'. Markevitch was also a composer whom Bartók himself numbered among his principal influences. Marco Polo has released various of Markevitch's works conducted by Christopher Lyndon-Gee, including the three pieces issued here compellingly played under the composer's own direction: *L'envol d'Icare* and *Le nouvel âge* (both recorded in 1938 with the Belgian National Orchestra) – performances notable for their boldness and edge; and a fulsome orchestration of Bach's *Musical Offering*, recorded in 1956. By far the best items are those that reflect the modernist creative zone in which Markevitch himself was active: Dallapiccola's *Canti di prigionia*;

Markevitch's skill as a conductor of Tchaikovsky is most tellingly illustrated

two versions of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* previously coupled on Testament (the stereo option being the more electrifying), his *Baiser de la fée* Divertimento and his *Pulcinella* and *Petrushka* suites; an eventful reading of Shostakovich's First Symphony; a spruce Prokofiev First as well as his *Le pas d'acier* – an exceptional reading by any standards – and his *Scythian* and *The Love for three Oranges* suites, both given typically pointed and characterful performances. There are

two versions of *Peter and the Wolf*, the earlier of the two with a very polite-sounding Wilfred Pickles (not a hint of 'Mabel at the table') and the other an OTT stereo version in French, with Peter Ustinov.

Markevitch's skill as a conductor of Tchaikovsky is most tellingly illustrated in his two recordings of the *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy Overture, the earliest (and most exciting) recorded in 1954 with the French National Radio Orchestra, the later one with the Philharmonia Orchestra (stereo and not mono as stated) – both resembling, in their fierce attack and romantic phrase-shaping, Willem Mengelberg's classic recording with the Concertgebouw Orchestra on 78s. Ditto in the case of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony, another charismatic performance.

A sequence of Verdi overtures is (like Markevitch's New Philharmonia orchestral Verdi for Philips) dramatic and theatrical, but I was relatively (and unexpectedly) underwhelmed by a programme of Rossini overtures with the French National Radio Orchestra, likewise in the case of Mendelssohn's *Italian* Symphony. Haydn fares well (Symphonies Nos 101 and 102, the *Clock's Andante* running very fast); and Markevitch the colourist – he was still attending to the orchestral canvases of others long after he'd stopped composing himself – is active in music by Bartók, Berlioz, Borodin, Brahms, Britten, Busoni, Chabrier, Chopin (arr Douglas), Debussy, Dukas, Glinka (the opera *A Life for the Tsar* with Boris Christoff), Handel (a rather stodgy *Concerto grosso* Op 6 No 5), Lyadov, Mozart, Mussorgsky, Offenbach

(the opera *La Périochole*), Ravel, Saint-Saëns, Satie, Schubert (Symphony No 8), Sibelius, Strauss (*Le bourgeois gentilhomme*), Tommasini and Weber. A personal favourite is Markevitch's balletic Philharmonia account of the three dances from Falla's *Three-Cornered Hat*.

In the case of the **Jean Martinon** set there's a first Erato release of a live complete recording of the Falla ballet from 1972 with the ORTF Orchestra, occasionally rough-edged but wonderfully alive, and captured in dry but vivid stereo sound. Other rarities, again recorded live with the ORTF Orchestra, are Bartók's *Miraculous Mandarin* Suite (not quite the precision-tooled production that Martinon made in Chicago but just as gripping) and a riveting traversal of Roussel's Third Symphony. Roussel figures prominently – the ballets *Bacchus et Ariane*, *Aeneas* and *The Spider's Feast* (all three played complete), the *Petite Suite*, *Pour une fête de printemps* and the Second Symphony. More sketchy perhaps than the tightly controlled Martinon performances of the Decca, Philips, DG and RCA years, these 'late' recordings nonetheless feature some fine performances.

I wasn't quite sure about the transcription of Khachaturian's Violin Concerto for flute, that's in spite of Jean-Pierre Rampal's dextrous playing (the slow movement and finale come off best), but works with organ featuring Marie-Claire Alain (Saint-Saëns Third Symphony and the Poulenc Concerto) are excellent, as is Poulenc's *Concert champêtre* with Robert Veyron-Lacroix (harpsichord) and Pierné's *Concertstück* featuring harpist Lily Laskine.

Symphonies by Franck, Landowski, Dukas (plus the ballet *La Péri*), Berlioz (*Symphonie fantastique* and *Lélio*) and Schumann (a forthright account of the Fourth with the Orchestre mondial des jeunesses musicales) not to mention Lalo's complete *Symphonie espagnole* on a famous (mono) Philharmonia recording with David Oistrakh and various shorter works complete a very desirable collection. Both sets are very well transferred though some of the ORTF recordings sound just a little blowzy, which occasionally compromises on finer detail, but they certainly never want for vitality.

THE RECORDINGS



'Igor Markevitch: The Complete HMV Recordings'
Warner Classics
© 18 2564 61549-3



'Jean Martinon: The Late Years'
Erato © 14
2564 61549-7



Igor Markevitch: his legacy for HMV as both conductor and composer is celebrated in a 18-CD set

Yet more from a rostrum magician

Like Martinon **Leopold Stokowski** has been handsomely served on CD, though there seems no end to the amount of interesting material, either live or studio, that has been surfacing of late. Pristine Audio's collection of 'CD and Digital Premieres', all of them recorded in New York between 1941 and 1950, confirm rather than extend what we already know. Wagner is served in the first instance by a glamorous and exciting Overture and Venusberg Music from *Tannhäuser*, the main body of the Venusberg ecstatic in the extreme, with some furious tempos, multiple *rubati* and a very fruity-sounding chorus to close (I also love the bird-like woodwinds just before the end, flying hurriedly across the sound stage). This performance alone would in my view be enough to justify purchase.

We're also offered an equally compelling *Tannhäuser* Third Act Prelude, impassioned fragments of a *Tristan* Prelude and Liebestod, surplus to requirements perhaps (given that we have complete Stokowski recordings of the same music) but nice to hear, a plushly upholstered but warmly played transcription of Purcell's 'When I am laid in earth' and a truncated account of the slow movement from Tchaikovsky's

Fifth Symphony, the most obvious 'amputation' being the horn solo at the beginning. In fact the music doesn't actually start until the onset of the second subject. A forthright 'Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy' and a vivid trio of extracts from Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges* Suite complete an enjoyable, though variable, reissue.

THE RECORDING



'Leopold Stokowski: CD and Digital Premieres'
Pristine Audio
© 2 PASC442

Charles Munch in New York

Another conductor whose art deserves permanent representation on CD is the Alsatian **Charles Munch**, due to be commemorated big time by RCA in a large box-set. Not that Munch's sizeable RCA legacy is all we have of him on disc. Pristine Audio has gathered together his late 1940s recordings with the New York Philharmonic, a mixture of live and studio material, all well transferred by Mark Obert-Thorn. The 1947 account of Saint-Saëns' Third Symphony (with organist Edouard Niels-Berger and pianists Walter Hendl and Arthur Schuller) flies at a fair

lick, with surging dynamics and an especially brilliant reading of the *Scherzo*.

Robert Casadesus appears in three works, D'Indy's *Symphony on a French Mountain Air*, impressive whether in the brooding first movement or the glittering finale; a live account of Liszt's Second Piano Concerto that downplays barnstorming passion for the sake of structural unity and Mozart's Piano Concerto No 21, the outer movements undeniably impressive (Munch's handling of the first *tutti* proves how adept he was at pointing the winds in relation to the strings), with Casadesus' own flamboyant cadenzas included, but for me the rather romanticised, even stodgy, account of the central *Andante* outstays its welcome. A live *Haffner* Symphony reminded me of Toscanini's famous Victor set with the same orchestra, albeit with less extreme contrasts in tempo and texture and less sensitivity to inner voicing, and the one relative failure is Chabrier's *Bourrée fantasque* in Mottl's orchestration which although spirited is none-too-well disciplined in its execution. In most other respects, an enjoyable programme.

THE RECORDING



'Charles Munch: Complete New York Philharmonic Recordings'
Pristine Audio
© 2 PASC448

Rivers have rarely sounded as beautiful as this.



Image: the Danube at Grein, lithograph c. 1840.

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The Varsi legacy

Proof of musical credentials for the Uruguayan pianist Dinorah Varsi (1939–2013) positively flows from this handsome collection, and never more so than in the celebrated 18th Variation from Rachmaninov's *Paganini* Rhapsody (part of a complete performance with the Stuttgart RSO under Sir Neville Marriner) where the sheer joy in the playing, its combination of embracing passion and luminous tone, not to mention the unfettered manner of Varsi's phrasing, place her, pedigree-wise, en route to Maria João Pires from Clara Haskil (she took first prize in the Concours Clara Haskil in 1967) and Lili Kraus. I would strongly advise listening, initially, without reference to the very substantial LP-sized book provided, certainly if, like me, you know precious little about Varsi aside perhaps from the handful of recordings that she made in duet with violinist Arthur Grumiaux, which are also included. The playing is the thing.

Chopin is an obvious first port of call, with warmly considered, poetically phrased accounts of the Nocturnes, playful but never cavalier Mazurkas (inner voices always carefully attended to), brilliant Impromptus that wear a mischievous demeanour, and a thought-provoking set of the Op 28 Preludes. All three piano sonatas are included, and the rigour of Varsi's approach attests to a significant musical intelligence.

A pupil of Shure and Anda, Dinorah Varsi reflected her masters' best qualities

To call this playing 'old-world' would be to freeze it in time; 'oblivious of modern manners' might be a better epithet – this and similar issues hinted at in the filmed teaching sessions which are also included in the set. To watch Varsi work with students helps you realise how she facilitated a hotline to the muses, which didn't always mean adhering strictly to the letter of the score. An intuitive musician as well as a conscientious interpreter, Varsi knew how to balance head and heart. You listen carefully and sense the rightness of her approach, even when you're not absolutely sure why what you're hearing is so right. Sensing it is more than enough.

Both sets of Chopin Etudes reveal how Varsi is at pains to stress the musical rather than the technical aspects of these glorious perennials, the 'Revolutionary' from Op 10 (No 12) slamming home



Dinorah Varsi: 'facilitated a hotline to the muses, which didn't always mean adhering strictly to the letter of the score'

with fierce accents, yet avoiding any suggestion of vulgarity. Likewise Op 25 No 7, as heartrending an account of this impassioned tone-poem as you'll find anywhere. Some works appear more than once, the Brahms Op 79 Rhapsodies, for example, the later G minor superior to the earlier version by some considerable distance, more supple, richer in tone, with purposefully (but subtly) spread chords. All Brahms's shorter pieces are included (Op 76 and Op 116–19) and they are among the set's unquestioned glories, performances that are intimate, declamatory, austere, romantic, mystical, sad – everything that the music itself is.

On the concerto front, Brahms's First and Second are respectful, the B flat being marginally more compelling than the D minor but Chopin's concertos under Jan Krenz paint a far more positive picture with immaculate finger work and, in the two finales, notably buoyant rhythms. Beethoven's Fourth (under Paul Kletzki) and Fifth are again good; so are Rachmaninov's Second, Tchaikovsky's First and Liszt's First – all utterly reliable, though distinguishing features are in shorter supply than in the solo works.

Two versions of *Kreisleriana*, one live the other studio, are similar to the extent of replicating Varsi's very quick manner in the off-beam, rocking-horse finale. Other Schumann – the *Humoreske*, *Fantasiestücke* Op 12, *Carnaval*, *Davidstümmelertänze*, *Symphonic Studies* and most strikingly the Fantasy in C – hark back to the personalised Schumann recordings of Cortot and Moiseiwitsch, if not in specific detail then certainly in their common feeling of romantic engagement.

Debussy *Préludes* enjoy clarity as well as atmosphere and various Beethoven sonatas prioritise structure and design above expressive indulgence. The same goes for Schubert, the penultimate piano sonatas (though not the last in B flat) warmed and humanised rather than rendered austere, which sometimes happens nowadays. I love the way Varsi coaxes the bouncy second set in the D958's Sonata's, not taken too swiftly or emphatically, and the rhapsodic way she plays up the inherent drama in D664.

Rameau and Bach are represented, so are Haydn, Mozart (including three concertos) and Bartók (a superb Sonata for two pianos and percussion), Liszt, Fanny Hensel, Mendelssohn, Ravel (a very playful Concerto in G), Clara Schumann, Brahms and Chopin cello works with Boris Pergamenschikov, Albéniz, some filmed material and a CD of very early recordings in rather crumbly sound (everything else is fine).

So that's how I've opted to use my word-count, substantiating a very firm recommendation for memorable recordings of a wonderful if little known pianist. A pupil of Leonard Shure and Géza Anda, Dinorah Varsi reflected her masters' best qualities, most notably a discernible personality that enhanced the music's effect without overwhelming it. That, really, is all you need to know.

THE RECORDING



'Dinorah Varsi: Legacy'

Genuin
 © (35 CDs + 5 DVDs)
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Books



Peter Quantrill on a new study of Beethoven's nine symphonies:

'This is water-cooler Beethoven, ideal for gleaning and passing on nuggets of variously earnest or emotional sincerity'



Harriet Smith reviews Alfred Brendel's latest volume of wisdom:

'Brendel is 84, though, as the new contributions to the book demonstrate, he has lost none of his edge, nor his subversive wit'

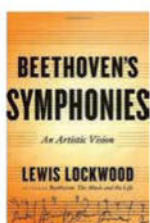
Beethoven's Symphonies

An Artistic Vision

By Lewis Lockwood

WW Norton & Company, 320pp, PB, £19.99

ISBN 978-0-39307-644-8



Every age gets the Beethoven scholarship it deserves. When the new discipline (noble art or debased science as you prefer) of popular writing about music needed a hero, it made one in the image of Beethoven, shortly after his death. Berlioz and Schumann's first job as self-appointed music critics was to get Beethoven's name out there, established as their own progenitor; finer judgements could wait. If most of their readers could hear the symphonies at all, it was by playing them at home. The later 19th century's mania for encyclopedic classification alighted hungrily on the Nine, sorted them out in *Grove*, boxed them up, odd and even. The nationalists and politicians pressed the Fifth and Ninth into service. In the second half of the last century, the symphonies were steadily personified on the one hand for a radio, LP and CD audience with less and less practical experience of the music, and cut down to size by historical scholarship on the other. What is left for us now, beyond the involutions of historiography?

Enter Lewis Lockwood, whose major study of Beethoven was in the running for a Pulitzer Prize, 'flawlessly researched' and possessed of 'innate authority', according to a fellow reviewer (11/14). In *Beethoven's Eroica Sketchbook*, he and Alan Gosman surveyed and analysed the sources not only of the Third but of many of the mid-period masterpieces, reaching ingenious conclusions of lasting value. This satellite work, on the other hand, reads like recycled and expanded programme notes. With a mass audience in mind, Norton has relegated music examples to an online appendix, as though those who know what

to do with them will be prepared to flick between page and screen, and those who don't won't miss out on much anyway. It's a patronising, false economy.

Lockwood begins as precisely he means to go on by quoting Karl Holz, one of several of Beethoven's young associates who would never now be remembered but for the touch of stardust on their shoulders. Beethoven's conversation books record only what others said to him, of course, and not he to them, so we are left with gems such as 'Your works have, throughout, a really exceptional character'. Come the *Eroica*, and Beethoven's view of Napoleon is enlarged upon for five pages, the Funeral March just one, along the lines of: 'Berlioz. What he said.'

Where harmonic or formal analysis is undertaken, in the first movement of the Fifth, it is vitiated by a lack of bar numbers allowing us to follow Lockwood's argument for ourselves, such as it is: in this symphony as distinct from the *Eroica*, or for that matter any other, Beethoven is apparently 'speaking from deep within himself'.

If any of the nine remain under-discussed today, it is the smallest – the First, Second and Eighth – and these come off worst. His neat summary of the First as 'strong but not radical' follows Berlioz and Tovey. The Eighth's Minuet is 'a compact example of the form in small dimensions'. Leaving aside the redundant qualification, only K550 among Mozart's later symphonies has a longer minuet. The Trio has a cello part 'presumably to be played by one cellist', with a note referring to an article on Haydn. Jonathan Del Mar (whose edition confirms the solo instrumentation) is conspicuous by his absence, as is most up-to-date scholarship in a volume where 'recent' can be applied to research published 20 years ago and more.

The Ninth's chapter is padded out with reflections on national anthems. At least the Sixth offers a useful cross-genre comparison of ensemble cadenzas, vocal and instrumental, such as conclude the 'Scene by the Brook', and the Seventh makes observations on the similarity between the

finale's theme and one of his Irish folksong settings, which potentially undermines the Hellenistic, even tragic narrative that has been read into the symphony through its pervasive, long-short-short dactylic tattoo. The argument isn't carried through, however, and 'dactylic rhythm' remains with 'Kantian ideals' a dead trail, unexplained and unexplored.

Lockwood rhetorically asks whether such a book is needed, but not, more pertinently, who it is for. This is water-cooler Beethoven, ideal for gleaning and passing on nuggets of variously earnest or emotional sincerity, if you don't mind running the risk of a smart Alec countering your 'Schumann said that the Fourth was like a slender Greek maiden' with 'Schumann said that in 1837. He also said he was infuriated by gushing enthusiasm and raving about "Beethoven's freedom from earthliness, his transcendental flight from star to star". What do you think?'

There are non-sequiturs and repetitions which do not reflect well on the book's production. Lockwood notes that the Eighth lacks a slow movement, but then asserts that the *Allegretto scherzando* is 'the shortest of all Beethoven's symphonic slow movements'. Pressed for time or not, he has cooked up a half-baked soufflé of stale scholarship, floury prose and hot air. If you are sufficiently inclined towards Mary Berry's generosity of spirit to see for yourself, don't say you weren't warned. **Peter Quantrill**

Music, Sense and Nonsense

Collected Essays and Lectures

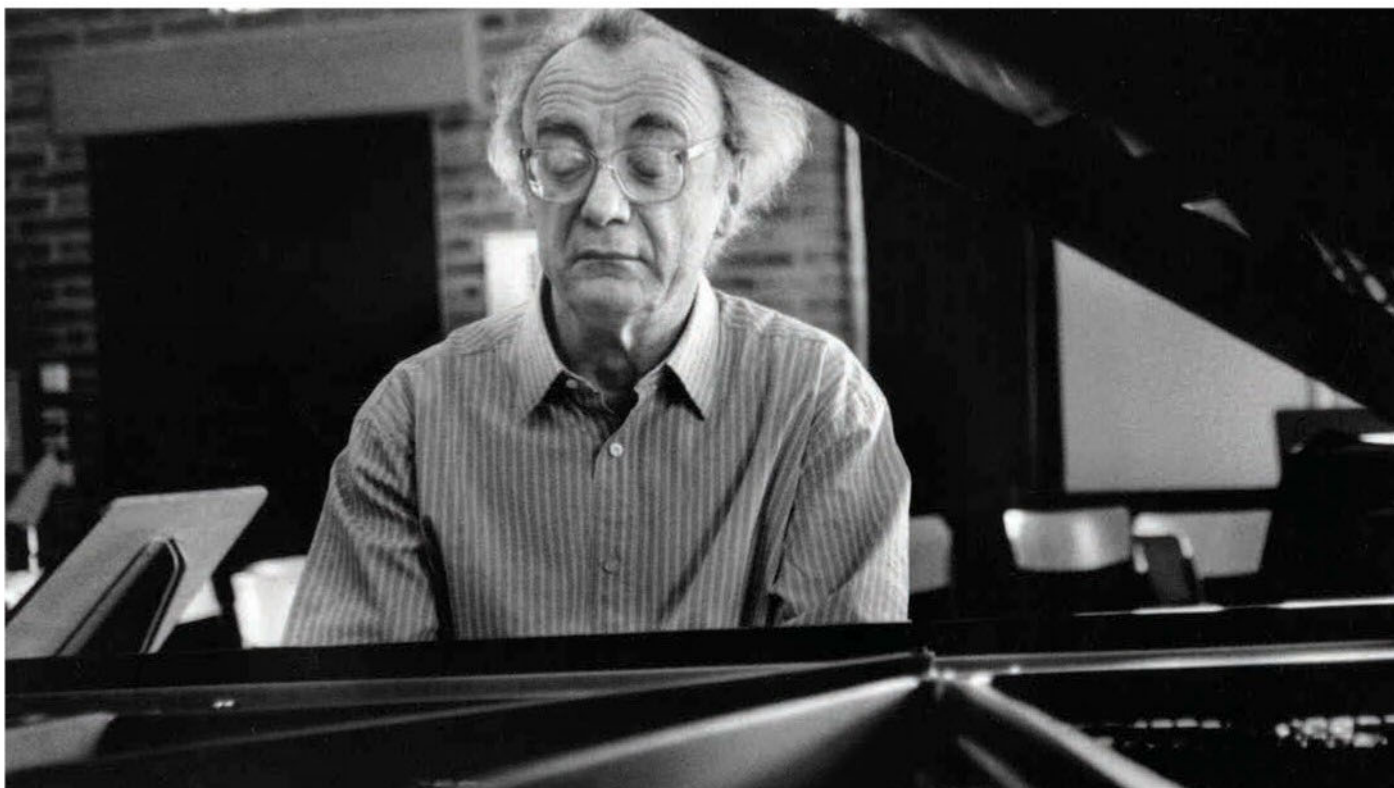
By Alfred Brendel

Biteback Publishing, 464pp, HB, £19.99

ISBN 978-1-84954-905-9



Music, Sense and Nonsense is the final incarnation of Brendel's essays and lectures in print. He is, after all, 84, though, as the new contributions to the book demonstrate, he has lost none of his



Clarity, warmth, wisdom – and utterly personal: an updated collection of essays from Alfred Brendel

edge, nor his subversive wit. Rather as Edmund de Waal describes himself as a potter who writes, so Brendel has been for much of his life a pianist who writes.

A substantial portion of the book is devoted to his essays from earlier tomes: *Musical Thoughts and Afterthoughts* and *Music Sounded Out*, published in 1976 and 1990 respectively. While everything is utterly personal, it also – unintentionally – shines a spotlight on changing musical tastes through the latter part of the 20th century.

Brendel's apology for Liszt in 1961, for instance, came at a time when audiences were suspicious of any artist who championed his music alongside the classics. Mind you, his observation that 'Liszt's piano music depends to a great extent on an art that makes us forget the physical side of piano playing. Yet it tends to be a vehicle for players of mere manual ability who lack any deeper musical insight' is still too often true today. Or this, from 1984, but still relevant now: 'For most performers and virtually all concert audiences of our time, music is an entirely serious business. Performers are meant to function as heroes, dictators, poets, seducers, magicians or helpless vessels of inspiration.'

The thinking behind his retirement as a pianist, in December 2008, is amplified in a conversation with Martin Meyer: 'Even when I was young, I had the distinct impression that the so-called "late style"

was a compromise with arthritis. For arthritis read articular degeneration, myositis and neuritis, and other conditions that come with advanced age.'

That's part of a discussion with Meyer from 2010, which is a continuation of their extended dialogue in *The Veil of Order*, and is alone worth the price of this new volume. Meyer's similarly wide cultural preoccupations mean this is a conversation between equals. Among many gems is Brendel's response to the question 'Does a performer have to be an intellectual?': 'I never think of myself as an intellectual, that is to say as someone who is guided primarily by his intellect. I am a musician and a writer who also thinks. There are instinctive musicians of great stature, but one must not conclude that they alone can move us. That is nonsense. It is through the combination of chaos and order, feeling and reflection that the heat of chaos should be reduced through order to warmth – which in turn warms the coolness of order.'

Some of the activities with which Brendel has busied himself since retiring are in evidence. Two essays on two of the great masterpieces of chamber music – Schubert's G major String Quartet and Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge* and the Op 130 Quartet – are a result of coaching quartets; in both instances Brendel not only discusses the works in hand with his usual clarity and warmth but also sets them in a wider context with a wisdom that comes from being a musician rather than a mere

academic. And then of course there's his poetry, which he claims to be the work of an alter ego, duly creating a surrealistic conversation entitled 'Me, Myself and I' between two Alfred Brendels (a rather terrifying notion).

Edwin Fischer, Brendel's beloved teacher, reappears time and again, and in a newly published essay, 'On Some Performance Habits', he launches with this bon mot: 'Edwin Fischer coined an admirable formula for the task of the performer: give life to the work without violating it.' Brendel then deals wittily but robustly with the dangers of 'authentic' performance (without naming it as such) and then proceeds to demolish 'firm rules', pointing up their idiocy. 'There are players who execute each trill as if ringing the same doorbell... Trills can be intensely expressive.' The book is full of such delights.

His views on second-rate film music are as pertinent as those on unwanted noise: 'Noise pollution is to the mind what cigarette smoke is to the lungs.' Touchingly personal are the essays on hearing and a fond reminiscence of the pianist Katja Andy. But, above all, it's humour that is a constant, and aptly it has the last word in an altogether remarkable book: 'For me the most phenomenal blessings I could discover on this planet next to love were music and humour. They imbue life with sense. (And nonsense.)'.

Harriet Smith

Classics RECONSIDERED



Lindsay Kemp and **Charlotte Gardner** discuss Trevor Pinnock's landmark, and *Gramophone* Award-winning, late-1980s recording of Corelli's Op 6 Concerti grossi and assess if it still deserves its 'classic' status



Corelli

12 Concerti grossi, Op 6

The English Concert / Trevor Pinnock

Archiv Produktion © 2 474 9072

From 423 626-2AH2 (1/89)

Listening to 12 concertos, one after another, is hardly what the composer expected or intended, but the exercise does forcefully drive home the powerful sense of the composer's breadth of imagination and technique. In the course of these works one encounters a rich panoply of *concertino* and *ripieno* ensemble textures. Trevor Pinnock at the harpsichord is always alert

to the exigencies of Corelli's palette of ensemble colour and Simon Standage, the leader and first violin soloist, is adept at taking his cues.

The *concertino* playing of Standage, Micaela Combetti and Jaap Ter Linden is technically and stylistically never in question. Standage's cadential elaborations and transitional ones, indeed those of Pinnock and the theorist Nigel North in the *Grave* of No 2 and elsewhere, are extremely tasteful, as too is his ornamentation in the *Adagio* of No 9, if a trifle cool by Italian standards. Standage

and Combetti play, as always, in complete mutual sympathy, giving moments of exhilaration. The fashion now – to many listeners' delight and relief – is towards using more vibrato, though it is applied with great discernment.

These performances have a wonderful sweep, conveying a grandeur of conception that too often eludes other ensembles. The English Concert never descend to sentimentalism and instead project a lively and sincere love of the music. These are truly inspired performances that should give great pleasure. **Julie Anne Sadie (1/89)**

Lindsay Kemp It really is quite a while since I've listened to these recordings, generally acknowledged when they came out at the end of the 1980s to be the first truly accomplished period-instrument versions of these seminal works, but inevitably pushed slightly into the background since by newer ones with (for better or worse) varying approaches. I admit I was ready to find them left behind a little by developments, but no – how enjoyable they still are! Totally of their time in their warm English elegance and crystal clarity, they nevertheless come across as fresh, buoyant and naturally joyous.

Charlotte Gardner I absolutely agree! With certain much newer recordings now the ones ringing in my ears, I really wasn't sure what to expect, even though The English Concert were really the band that first lured me in to the world of period-instrument performances along with Christopher Hogwood and the Academy of Ancient Music. However, I found myself falling in love all over again. As for why, much as I'm tempted to cite the sheer perfection of their sound as my stand-out point before diving in to the nitty-gritty of performance

decisions, it's actually your final point – the sheer joyousness of their playing – that had me hooked again. If there's one thing that often falls by the wayside these days with the many highly scholarly new recordings, it's the sense of joy. Here though, it's palpable.

LK Yes, with Pinnock the sense of his love for the music he's playing always comes over more strongly than any preconceived notions of how it should go or what it should be. I once heard him described as an 'arch-authenticist', but he's said himself that 'history has no place on the platform', and that he got interested in using period instruments for the simple reason that they seemed the best ones for the job. The English Concert was one of the first Baroque orchestras to achieve a consistently high technical standard, and here they are, 15 years old, really enjoying their own skill.

CG Yes, the 'consistently high technical standard' was the thing. A year before this recording came out, Raymond Leppard let off some period-band-induced steam in his book *Authenticity in Music*, complaining that 'too often the less good players hide their

technical and musical deficiencies under the mantle of "authenticity" and sit behind their "original" instruments bristling with insecure dislike of their colleagues in the professional mainstream.' What a put-down! These days I don't think anyone sits down to listen to a period-instrument ensemble expecting to hear anything less than the highest technical skill. Funnily though, as I sat ruminating over this recording, at times I wondered whether it might sound almost too glossily perfect...

LK I know what you mean, but if this is a studio-y kind of perfection, I do think TEC's pre-eminence as an ensemble extended to its concert performances as well. If there's nothing exactly 'dirty' here, what is quite noticeable from the stylistic point of view is how (a few saucy speeds aside) these performances can be quite 'straight', often using long, evenly articulated notes. In that respect they are perhaps not so far away from the Academy of St Martin in the Fields way of doing things. Pinnock did actually play on their 1974 Corelli Op 6 recording (as did Christopher Hogwood).



Trevor Pinnock (right) recording with The English Concert

CG I think that glossy sense of perfection is certainly not just a studio-y one, and after much musing and darting back to other recordings I ended up wholeheartedly embracing it for what it was. It's all so wonderfully elegant without ever becoming prissily so. Those long bows and evenly articulated notes are certainly a major contributing factor, as is the complete harmonic and linear symbiosis of Simon Standage and Micaela Comberti. They remind me of the title given to Corelli in 1706 upon his admission to the Arcadian Academy in Rome – 'Arcomelo', or 'The melodious bow'. If Corelli could pop up now to pass that title down to them then surely he would, based on these performances! Moving back to the lack of 'dirtiness', I think the fact that TEC have used theorbo over archlutes contributes to this. What are your feelings on archlutes?

LK I don't think I've been asked that question before! I suppose it depends on how loosely or not the term has been used, but since the player here for most of the concertos is Nigel North, who has always made a fairly strict distinction between the

smaller-bodied archlute and the larger theorbo, I figure it's probably the larger instrument, with its deeper bass notes, that's in use. And I guess I would say that gives the music more clean weight and less unruly tinkle! But perhaps it's more that he doesn't spread his chords all that much (leaving that kind of thing more to Pinnock on the harpsichord), and that there's only one of them. But go on, tell me what you think...

CG Well, the absence of archlutes – with their unruly tinkle! – was one of the most striking differences for me between TEC's sound and those of the more recent recordings at the top of my consciousness, such as Ensemble 415's big-band effort and also the Avison Ensemble's recording (which is probably my favourite of the recent crop). In these, not only is the lute sound far more prominent within the overall texture, but the archlute also features as a primary soloist in place of the violins at points, most notably in the *Adagios* of Nos 9 and 11. And I have to say that initially I missed that in TEC's version, mourning the timbral variety it lent to proceedings. However, now, after much

listening, I've concluded that I was just in the habit of archlutes as, on balance, the TEC's violins bring far more to those *Adagios* than solo lutes can manage.

LK Continuo playing was generally a bit more restrained back then, I think. Pinnock is relatively active here, but doesn't exercise the kind of creative freedom many modern-day players do. If Ton Koopman had recorded these concertos you can bet your bottom dollar his harpsichord would be all over it. But another thing that's more common today (especially in French or Italian performances) is a livelier approach to contrasts in dynamics and tempo, and greater attention to the music's rhetorical flow. When linked to playing on a similar level to The English Concert's – for instance in the 2012 recording by Gli Incogniti – the results can be highly enjoyable. That doesn't necessarily mean better; different times, different traditions, all have their place.

CG Indeed they do. Do you really think that Pinnock could have paid more attention to the music's rhetorical flow, though? I can't say that I was anything other than highly satisfied on that front, whereas the one moment that really doesn't do it for me is when they go for a particularly lively contrast of tempo, with the *Vivace* of No 3. I've nothing against saucy speeds in principle, but this just feels too fast. Plus, although it makes for a huge contrast with the preceding *Grave*, there's nowhere further to go with the following *Allegro*. My understanding of 18th-century Italian tempo markings is that *vivace* was as much – or more – about mood as speed, and interestingly the *Vivace* opening to No 8 is far more in line with that idea.

LK Perhaps I should have said 'rhetorical ebb and flow'! I wasn't thinking of block tempo contrasts so much as that performances nowadays are often more flexible at a local level, with a closer relationship to language, giving them more the feel of a lively conversation than an elegantly delivered speech. However, I don't think it occurred to me that this was something 'missing' at the time these recordings came out. Their virtues were obvious then, and still are now!

CG Ah, now I'm with you. You are so right about the virtues, too. To bring us full circle, this recording is remarkable for the way in which it manages to sound both of its time and as relevant today as it was 24 years ago, which is no mean achievement for a period performance. **G**

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

Medieval Christmas carols




Anonymous carols of the Middle Ages are a ubiquity of the festive season. In his selection of recordings of particularly notable ones, **Edward Breen** focuses mainly on the later part of the period – the 15th century

Christmas carols and associated traditions of carol singing offer medieval music an annual opportunity to penetrate the national subconscious. Alongside the sound of tolling bells and monks singing plainchant there are a few carols which now stand as aural emblems for the Middle Ages. For instance, take *Gaudete*, which was performed *a cappella* in the early 1970s by English folk-rock band Steeleye Span. It reached number 14 in the UK charts and introduced medieval music to a new audience, this present writer included. The performance itself is well worth revisiting since it is heartfelt and superbly committed and as such is the starting point for this guide. Other carols that are sure to be widely recognised are *The Coventry Carol* and *There is no rose of swych vertu*, the last carol in the Trinity Carol Roll manuscript. The following selection focuses mainly on 15th-century carols but also includes earlier examples as well as later arrangements that preserve medieval music.

For a medieval carol to qualify as such it needs a few basic features. First, it should be a setting of an English or Latin text in regular stanzas. Those with bilingual texts, such as *Nova, nova*, are called macaronic carols. A carol will also need a refrain, or burden, repeated after each stanza. Medieval carols might also cover many subjects, so here we have 10 examples to be sung at Christmas or during associated feasts including the Annunciation.

The chosen performances are all purely vocal except for two

particularly delightful examples where plucked strings or percussion join the singers. The list also contains two recordings by all-female ensembles. There is good evidence from the existence of communities such as Hildegard of Bingen's convent that women sang chant in the

Middle Ages, but for sacred polyphony – as with so many aspects of medieval practice – the case is unclear. When it comes to modern performance I defer to Susan Hellauer (from Anonymous 4), who once memorably remarked, 'You can't sing a footnote.' 



The Trinity Carol Roll, the earliest surviving source of English polyphonic carols, housed at Trinity College, Cambridge



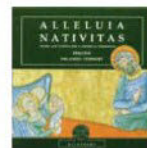
Anon: *Gaudete Steeleye Span*
Shanachie Ⓢ SHA-79039
This inescapable medieval earworm is known widely

from the later *Piae cantiones* collection of 1582. The oddly stressed syllables of the refrain 'Rejoice! Rejoice! Christ is born of the Virgin Mary; rejoice!' form the basis of this famously rustic performance which fades in and out to give the impression of a processional choir. Maddy Prior's light, nimble, folksy verse vocals create a charming contrast to the heavier texture of the refrain and convey a genuine sense of joy.



Anon: *Marvel not, Joseph*
The Hilliard Ensemble
Harmonia Mundi
Ⓢ HMA195 1106 (2/86[®])
Like most 15th-century English

carols, this anonymous work is characterised by rhythmic and metrical complexity. This intimate recording (made in 1982) may come relatively early in The Hilliard Ensemble's discography but it already demonstrates their clear vision for medieval interpretation. With warm sound and careful tuning this music - which in the wrong hands often sounds like the aural equivalent of solving a Rubik's cube - is interpreted in graceful, tender phrases.



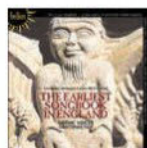
Smert: *Nowell, Nowell: The Boar's Head*
Orlando Consort
Metronome Ⓢ METCD1001
Also known as *The Exeter*

Boar's Head Carol, this piece was written by Richard Smert (c1400-78/79), a vicar-choral at Exeter Cathedral. It was likely sung at feasts in the hall there, and is notable for painting the feast as a symbol of Christ. The Orlando Consort (recorded here in 1992) are cool and stringent as they fearlessly navigate complex 15th-century rhythms. Robert Harre-Jones's exquisite countertenor singing lends radiance to the sprightly top line of this texture.



Anon: *Lullay: I saw a swete semly syght*
Anonymous 4
Harmonia Mundi
Ⓢ HMU90 7099 (12/93)

The beautiful sighing motifs of this carol create a classic lullaby feature in the refrain and are probably one reason why it is comparatively well represented on disc. But the clarity and crystalline tuning of Anonymous 4 make this recording stand out from others for sheer sonic beauty and also for suggesting 'motherese' through stillness and intimate qualities. This, the ensemble's second album, 'On Yoolis Night', justly topped classical billboards.



Anon: *Verbum patris umanatur O O*
Gothic Voices / Christopher Page
Hyperion Ⓢ CDH55297 (A/OO[®])

This 13th-century carol for New Year's Day might well be our earliest surviving three-part polyphonic work. It has a particularly joyful refrain, which, like the verse sections, contains celebratory exclamations. In this performance (1999) the rolling contrast between busy, dissonant passages and sparse open fifths bristles with energy thanks to exacting tuning and clear, bright voices. As ever with Gothic Voices, attention is drawn to the vertical as well as the horizontal.



Trad, arr King's Singers: *Angelus ad virginem*
King's Singers
Signum Ⓢ SIGCD502 (1/04)

Annunciation carols have been sung during the Christmas season since the Middle Ages. Although possibly French in origin, this one survives in many English manuscripts and appears in Chaucer's 'The Miller's Tale'. The King's Singers draw on a 14th-century source and sandwich the polyphonic texture between solo and unison verses with percussion. Their exuberant singing has a rustic tinge capturing the toe-tapping triple-time metre perfectly. A compelling performance, then - I just wish they had recorded more verses.



Trad, arr Leighton: *Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child (The Coventry Carol)*
New York Polyphony
Avie Ⓢ AV2141 (12/07)

Possibly the most famous music from a medieval mystery play, this comes to us via a 16th-century source copied in the 19th century. It survived by a thread but won a deserving place in the repertoire. New York Polyphony sings modestly in a resonant acoustic with rich, warm vowel sounds, drawing the listener closer and focusing attention on the refrain. Of the many superb recordings available, this one stands out for its avoidance of over-characterisation in verse two.



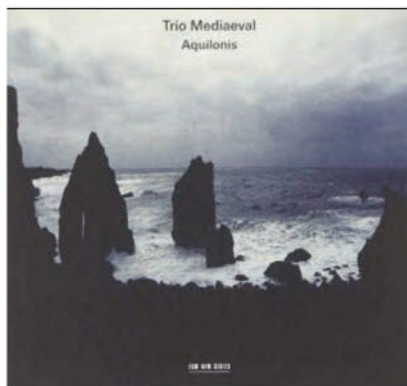
Ther is no rose of swych vertu
Gabrieli Consort / Paul McCreesh
DG Ⓢ 477 7635 (3/09)
This 15th-century carol,

preserved in the famous Trinity Carol Roll, displays an attractive and characteristically English technique called 'faburden', resulting in a cascade of 6-3 chords. McCreesh's singers also perform in a resonant acoustic but they are more distant than New York Polyphony, inviting the listener to observe Mary from afar. The soloists for the two-part verses navigate the long and complex Latin-texted melisma in an unhurried and assured fashion.



Anon: *Nova, nova*
Alamire / David Skinner
Obsidian Ⓢ CD709 (12/12)
This monophonic carol tells the story of the Annunciation and

was recorded at the Wren Library of Trinity College, Cambridge, where its manuscript source, the Trinity Carol Roll, now lives. The refrain references a popular medieval metaphor: Mary as the new Eve, punning on Gabriel's first word 'Ave' (Eva backwards). Alamire uses early English pronunciation, two tenor soloists and unison refrains underpinned and interspersed with an attractive array of plucked sounds. Instrumental verses create a wondrous sense of expectation.



Trad: *Alleluia: A Newë Work*

Trio Mediaeval
ECM New Series Ⓢ 481 1160

This grand and complex carol from the 15th century alternates solo, two- and three-part sections and contains a splendid Alleluia in its refrain. The Scandinavian sopranos of Trio Mediaeval (Anna Maria Friman, Linn Andrea Fuglseth and Berit Opheim) have been making a name for themselves with both medieval and modern music since 1997 and this, 'Aquilonis', their sixth and most recent album

with ECM, reaches new heights of both atmosphere and beauty. In *Alleluia: A Newë Work*, Trio Mediaeval sing with palpable joy and exuberance, the texture light and effervescent without compromise of tuning or ensemble, and the text crystal clear. Occasionally, the singers decorate the line with deft and stylish vocal ornamentation that adds an exciting frisson.

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Humperdinck's Hänsel und Gretel

Vivid storytelling, characterful singing and sumptuous orchestral playing are all vital to bring this fascinating fairytale opera to life, says **Andrew Mellor** as he sets out on his quest for the finest recordings

Much of the writing on *Hänsel und Gretel* – be it critical, musicological, dramaturgical or purely responsive – has an undertone of surprise. It's the surprise of two raised eyebrows, an ever-so-slight bafflement that the opera is still so cherished and even a grudging reluctance to admit it into the operatic pantheon, despite acknowledgement of its wondrous qualities. Maybe we're still a little embarrassed that the story of two children, a witch and a gingerbread house should enjoy such staying power in buildings that the likes of Gluck and Wagner worked so hard to make sanctuaries of psychology and profundity.

Of all those sanctuaries, there can be none more symbolic than Bayreuth. It was at Wagner's festival theatre in 1882 that an opera audience got its first taste of Engelbert Humperdinck, courtesy of a bridge passage the composer hastily fashioned to cover a scene change in *Parsifal*, helping his mentor out of a fix. Those months working at Bayreuth were vital for Humperdinck. The composer said at the time that he would 'willingly give up originality' if he could write choruses as well as Wagner. But when Humperdinck discovered what he really could do, it proved enough for him to half-mock Wagner, describing his fairytale opera *Hänsel und Gretel* as a 'Festival Drama for the Consecration of a Nursery'.

That was a prescient comment, given the frequency with which you read the phrase 'Wagner for kids' (or similar) in relation to *Hänsel und Gretel*. But Humperdinck's world is no child-friendly imitation of *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal*. He achieved

different ends from Wagner via different means – however similar his processes might appear and whatever he might have taken from his senior's endless melodies, weaving transitions and luxurious orchestral upholstery. Children enjoy *Hänsel und Gretel* because it tells a story about these characters and does so with dramatic clarity, the same reason that most adults enjoy it. All those moments we compare to moments in Wagner – the smashing of the milk jug (the shattering of Wotan's spear), the Witch's Ride (the Ride of the Valkyries), the song of the cuckoo (the song of the Woodbird) – prompt an acute theatrical reaction because of their musical directness and originality. There are no meta-narrative strings attached. Unless, that is, you want there to be.

And yet the music's beauty remains so unspeakably intense. Perhaps Humperdinck's librettist sister Adelheid Wette knew her brother would deliver when she asked him, innocently enough, to score some folk tunes for a play based on the Brothers Grimm tale to be staged informally in her own house. The almost naive, folk-derived notes that Humperdinck assigns to the 'Mit den Füßchen tapp tapp tapp!' dance and the Witch's 'Hocus pocus, Hexenschuss' are woven into the fabric of the opera with seamless and, yes, Wagnerian skill. But the true wonder of those motifs is what they communicate phonetically. The seven notes of 'Hocus pocus' – straightforward enough, related to the opera's central motif in their perfect-fifth rooting – speak absolutely and unequivocally of an evil witch's spell,



An illustration from the 1906 edition of *Hänsel und Gretel* by the Brothers Grimm

however much you know about music; and the composer's storybook weave hardly halts in *Hänsel und Gretel*, whether or not it's churning away at relevant themes like that one. Humperdinck's pure, even innocent conveyance of a pivotal event or a dramatic truth is all his own. It has, in the words of the critic Robin Legge, 'a poetry more enchanting than anything of the kind achieved by Wagner'.



PHOTOGRAPHY: ART ARCHIVE PICTURE DESK

HÄNSEL ON DVD

That's not to say that a child's understanding of an opera is the same as an adult's, even if the basics are consistent. You might argue, for example, that slapping a parallel conceptual narrative on top of an opera can alienate members of the audience who haven't seen said opera a few times before. But to do so on top of *Hänsel und Gretel* is so often fatal when you

consider not only the straight-talking score, but also the unique nature of this opera's audience (and, boy, does it still have one: there will be 28 separate productions this December in Germany alone).

We get plenty of shots of children in the auditoria on the available DVD recordings, and they can be fierce critics. Johannes Felsenstein's production from Dessau (2007), conducted by

Markus L. Frank, is overlaid with historical-political imagery and culminates in a happy family play-acting the Witch's shenanigans at home, a continuation of Felsenstein's theme but nobody's idea of a theatrical pay-off. When the orchestra quietsens down you can hear, painfully, that the kids in the audience are busy entertaining themselves.

A weedy sound doesn't help, particularly as the narrative wonder is all there in the



Angelika Kirchschrager as Hansel and Diana Damrau as Gretel in the 2008 Royal Opera House production by Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier

miracle of an orchestral performance that should have all of us wide-eyed in wonder. The Zurich Opera production from Frank Corsaro (1999) neatly underscores that, with kids lying on their bellies during the Prelude, peeping over the edge of **Franz Welser-Möst's** pit. But for armchair DVD audiences, the ready-made theatre of a committed orchestra is enough. A camera slowly tracks through the mysterious, glowing pit of the Metropolitan Opera as Vladimir Jurowski conducts the Prelude and the Witch's Ride on his DVD (2008), and it's truly spellbinding.

The portraiture in the Witch's Ride is built of the opera's trademark motivic simplicity, and the tension is entirely musical. For kids who don't know the ins and outs of orchestral instruments, good filming has a fascination of its own. The DVD of Laurent Pelly's Glyndebourne production (2008), with **Kazushi Ono**, overlays the Witch's Ride with flippant cartoon projections that undermine the fascinating magic of that music and its place in the drama. When they were removed

(or forgotten) for the Glyndebourne tour in 2013, the show was infinitely better.

We'll deal with the challenges of adult vocal portrayal of children later. But on screen, Hansel and his sister don't get much livelier than Angelika Kirchschrager and Diana Damrau (Royal Opera House, 2008), who consistently bounce off each other as a wannabe mature older sister and an increasingly engaged younger brother. Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier's production establishes a sense of pain via a remarkable performance from Elizabeth Connell's tortured mother. The show has a beautiful but unobtrusive twist at its end and a neat way around the often awkward appearance of the gingerbread house. But for all the warmth, **Sir Colin Davis's** orchestra lacks snap and momentum. Davis is the absolute opposite to Jurowski when the camera locks on to him in the pit, and it's a difference you can hear as well as see.

The Met has something of a tradition with this opera, which was the first to be broadcast live from its stage, on Christmas Day, 1931. Nathaniel Merrill's production

under **Thomas Fulton** (1982) is enchanting if you're in the market for something ultra-traditional; the cast, led by Judith Blegen's beaming Gretel, is pretty much faultless, but the show is visibly of 1980s vintage (particularly the choreography). Beamed to cinemas live from the same stage a quarter of a century later was that **Vladimir Jurowski**-conducted performance of Richard Jones's production, originally created for Welsh National Opera (where Jurowski first conducted it, too).

Of course, Jones wants his children in a flock-wallpapered room instead of a make-believe forest. But the magic of his production is that it conjures its own extraordinary fairytale world for all ages. Alice Coote and Christine Schäfer are more troubled and subtle than Kirchschrager and Damrau: Coote all surprised and confused, so much detail in her eyes and mouth; Schäfer an introvert, trying to hold it together, singing with that singular stopped diapason quality that marks her out in an instant. Philip Langridge, in his last recorded performance, brings

THE GOTHIC CHOICE

Anna Moffo, Helen Donath;
Munich Radio Orch / Kurt Eichhorn
RCA © ② 74321 25281-2

With reverberant and fizzy sound and a scare-the-children approach to the score's stalking darkness, Eichhorn's recording won't be to everyone's taste but it's oh so exciting.



THE TEXTURED CHOICE

Ingeborg Springer, Renate Hoff;
Staatskapelle Dresden / Otmar Suitner
Berlin Classics © ② 0184182BC
Suitner has quality in all departments



- with his singers full of character, plus that wonderful orchestra. And he varies his tempos and 'lighting' more than most.

THE DVD CHOICE

Alice Coote, Christine Schäfer; Metropolitan Opera / Vladimir Jurowski (directed by



Richard Jones)
EMI © DVD 206308-9

A truly spellbinding modern production with an outstanding cast, but under Jurowski's eagle eye and sharp baton it's all there musically, too (and you can see it).

the house down as the Witch but injects his pantomime performance with the right amount of something unpleasant. The Dream Pantomime – its 14 angels bulbous chefs laying out a dinner for the siblings, a fish-headed butler their maître d' – is as miraculous a sequence as I've seen on an opera stage. Jurowski takes it so very seriously. But he looks unusually moved, too.

STYLING THE SOUND

For their full, operatic version of *Hänsel und Gretel* premiered in Weimar two days before Christmas in 1893, Humperdinck and Wette significantly remodelled the plot handed down by the Brothers Grimm. The story was retro-fitted with a happy ending, and the character of the parents was transformed. For the Grimms, they were out-and-out abusers purposefully setting out to lose their children in the woods; in the opera, they are a couple pushed to the brink by poverty, their desperation spilling over into aggression (mother) and alcoholism (father) but their love for the children never really in question. Julian Johnson has written of Humperdinck's wrapping of his orchestra around the children as a musical metaphor for the 'unfailing love of a benign father'. A strong image, when you consider the opera's thematic link: the quartet of horns that breathe the opera's first breaths, the pivotal Evening Prayer, and the chorale that eventually prefaces the final curtain all draw on 'The Lord our God puts out His hand', the musical motto representing the philosophical ideal that's instilled in the family by the father.

In that sense, I find it hard to admire the vast, 'Alpine Symphony' sound stage of **Sir Charles Mackerras's** recording (2006), which lacks intimacy both theatrical and human and whose orchestra could never wrap itself around anything. That recording is low on storytelling in a similar way to **Herbert von Karajan's** on EMI (1953). In his 2002 *Gramophone* survey, Alan Blyth found Karajan's tempos sluggish, and so do I. But the problem is bigger than that, literally: a huge sound in Karajan's Prelude that affords little detail (the Prelude's wonderful string counter-melody at bar 194, along with much else, is lost in the melee).

The recording by **Sir Georg Solti** (1978), my go-to version until I started working on this survey, suffers similarly from a sense of demonstrative grandeur which some have heard as an overflow from his *Ring* cycle. When the grandstanding stretches to singers, albeit very fine ones (Brigitte Fassbaender and Lucia Popp), the sibling chemistry suffers. Solti's is



Humperdinck was greatly inspired by Wagner

a recording whose occasional momentum deficit seems to stem from the fact that everyone knows exactly what's coming next and makes no effort to hide it.

Initially, the sound in **Kurt Eichhorn's** recording (1971) also appears odd: the orchestra has a concert-hall echo and the transfer to disc is tinny. But unlike the Mackerras, the Solti and the Karajan, that sonic depth soon starts to add character for Eichhorn, who conjures up his very own forest-scape using differently lit corners of the Munich Radio Orchestra. The casting has big pluses (Lucia Popp ravishing as the Dew Fairy, Christa Ludwig keeping beauty in the voice by playing the Witch as a creep) as well as weaknesses (Anna Moffo is a defiantly girly Hansel and can sound like she's singing Lieder), but the momentum and atmosphere in this recording are second to none. Underneath the touching

father of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, the orchestra takes the form of the guzzling hag as the music tumbles towards the Witch's Ride. But I'm still baffled as to why any studio recording needs to break the momentum, as this and others do, with a gap between the father's declaration of 'Wir wollen ja beide zum Hexenritt!' and the orchestral collapse into the ride proper.

ONCE UPON A TIME...

Often you can detect ill-fitting orchestral characteristics from the get-go: do the four horns glow with fragility or resound with pomposity? Does the ensuing Prelude creep along, or is it argued? The Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra plays gregariously for **Andreas Delfs** (2003), and with what sounds like weeks of rehearsal behind it. The American accents work fairly well given the epoch we're in, and the English translation is communicative for the same reason. The way that the orchestra curls around the children in the forest scene – not entirely foe but not entirely friend, either – is wondrous.

What you get from **Otmar Suitner** with the Staatskapelle Dresden (1970) are those orchestral qualities plus playing of glorious sonority and Suitner's almost unparalleled knack of appearing to shift the lighting in a scene using his players. More often than not, the voices are right with him. Hear Theo Adam's father gasping 'Am Isenstein?' ('To the haunted wood?') against Suitner's swooping strings, or the quiet terror Adam then brings to his description of the forest crone.

That's what I miss from **Robin Ticciati's** live Glyndebourne recording (2010), which can feel aware of musical stylistics at the expense of human ones. When the witch

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1953 Grümmer [†] , Schwarzkopf [‡] ; Philh Orch / Karajan	EMI mono (B) ② 640716-2 (11/99 [†]); Naxos (S) ② 8 110897/8
1970 Springer [†] , Hoff [‡] ; Staatskapelle Dresden / Suitner	Berlin Classics (M) ② 0184182BC (1/86 [†])
1971 Moffo [†] , Donath [‡] ; Munich Radio Orch / Eichhorn	RCA (S) ② 74321 25281-2 (12/74 [†])
1974 Hug [†] , Lindner [‡] ; Gürzenich Orch, Cologne / Wallberg	EMI (S) ② 088279-2; (S) ② 973678-2
1978 Fassbaender [†] , Popp [‡] ; VPO / Solti	Decca (S) ② 478 0143DM2 (12/78 [†])
1982 Von Stade [†] , Blegen [‡] ; NY Met Opera / Fulton	DG (F) ② 073 4348GH
1989 von Otter [†] , Bonney [‡] ; Bavarian RSO / Tate	EMI (F) ② ② 754022-2 (11/90)
1992 Murray [†] , Gruberová [‡] ; Staatskapelle Dresden / C Davis	Decca (S) ② 478 3047DM2 (10/93 [†])
1994 Larmore [†] , Ziesak [‡] ; Bavarian RSO / Runnicles	Warner (B) ② 2564 68808-2; Teldec (S) ② ② 4509 94549-2 (1/95 [†])
1999 Nikiteanu [†] , Hartelius [‡] ; Zurich Op / Welser-Möst	ArtHaus (F) ② 101 536 (2/02 [†])
2003 Mentzer [†] , Murphy [‡] ; Milwaukee SO / Delfs [sung in English]	Avie (M) ② AVO050
2006 Larmore [†] , Evans [‡] ; Philh Orch / Mackerras [sung in English]	Chandos (M) ② CHAN3143 (9/07)
2007 Noack [†] , Marschall [‡] ; Anhalt PO, Dessau / Frank	ArtHaus (F) ② 101 321 (5/09); (F) ② 101 322
2008 Kirchschlager [†] , Damrau [‡] ; Royal Opera / C Davis	Opus Arte (F) ② ② OA1011D; (F) ② OA8D7032D
2008 Coote [†] , Schäfer [‡] ; NY Met Opera / Jurowski [sung in English]	EMI (F) ② 206308-9
2008 Holloway [†] , Kučerová [‡] ; LPO / Ono	Decca (F) ② 074 3361DH
2010 Coote [†] , Teuscher [‡] ; LPO / Ticciati	Glyndebourne (M) ② GF0CDO15-10 (10/12)

Key: [†]Hansel, [‡]Gretel

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is bundled into the oven, Ticciati's waltz says, 'This is how the best orchestras play a waltz.' But who cares about pointing a waltz correctly at the opera's moment of childish triumph? That – and the orchestra (recorded, with everyone else, on the handful of microphones fixed above the Glyndebourne stage) simply doesn't feel colourful or involved enough.

In 1992, Ticciati's mentor **Sir Colin Davis** has a wonderful cast, Ludwig reprising the superlative Witch we heard for Eichhorn. He also has a sonorous Staatskapelle Dresden. But he does far less with it than Suitner does. As at Covent Garden in 2008 the Witch's Ride is polite, and a strange, diverting emphasis on odd gestures scuppers the Dream Pantomime. Ann Murray gets to the heart of Hansel's inertia, Edita Gruberová is convincingly girlish and there's a nicely controlled father in Franz Grundheber. But the orchestral storytelling simply isn't vivid enough.

Similarly, **Donald Runnicles's** Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra recording (1994), though certainly in the top half-dozen, can lack bite and tend towards the grand. Bernd Weikl's father doesn't sound too scared of the hag in his description of her, and when the tame Witch's Ride arrives you realise why. With the same orchestra, **Jeffrey Tate** (1989) finds something more variegated, particularly when we get to the forest. There, Tate's horns are mystery critters, his strings creeping weeds.

THE HANSEL AND THE GRETEL

Tate's cast also delivers. It includes Runnicles's Witch Hanna Schwarz as the mother (just harridan enough) and surely the best Sandman on record in Barbara Hendricks. His Hansel and his Gretel echo the central question posed by Blyth: is vocal character, elasticity and beauty enough in this opera, or do we need our kids to sound, well, like kids? **Heinz Wallberg** (1974) gets round that by using children in the title-roles, but the experiment doesn't really come off for precisely those reasons of character and elasticity.

For Tate, Anne Sofie von Otter (Hansel) and Barbara Bonney (Gretel) take some time to find their childlike feet: von Otter discovers them some way into the First Act when Bonney also loses her slightly aristocratic tone. What the two have is chemistry, a touch more than Murray and Gruberová (for Davis) and Jennifer Larmore and Rebecca Evans (for Mackerras). Elsewhere, the 'adulthood' bemoaned by Blyth is a recurring problem: Fassbaender's Hansel for Solti is too tight



Alice Coote and Christine Schäfer in the 2008 Met Opera production directed by Richard Jones

and self-conscious; Suzanne Mentzer's for Delfs too mature. Elisabeth Grümmer and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf do surprisingly well for Karajan, the latter conveying Gretel's keen-to-please innocence. I find Larmore, vocally straight with a boyish undertow, ideal as Hansel for Runnicles and his Gretel, Ruth Ziesak, appropriately girly and twee; they combine for a really gorgeous Evening Hymn, which so often lacks blend (though Ticciati's Coote and Lydia Teuscher are something special here).

VERDICTS

Off the DVD screen, though, gender and age detailing has to play second fiddle to vocal character and musical storytelling: we need voices locked into the orchestra; we need to feel the fear, the wonder, the magic, the fright and the relief through teamwork. No team does that like Eichhorn's. I concede that the recording's gothic sound style isn't to everyone's taste and that there are issues with Helen Donath's sometimes wearing vocal tone. But it's the most theatrical recording of them all.

Suitner attempts many of the same things but with less eccentricity: he has character all over his cast, from Gisela Schröter's mother backed into a corner of desperation, Renate Hoff's girly-but-radiant Gretel and Ingeborg Springer's determined Hansel. Peter Schreier's Witch has everything the character needs to have without getting on your nerves (too much). If there are problems, they'd include

the fact that Suitner's swift speeds can sometimes gloss over the wonderment of Humperdinck's orchestral conversation and bustle; and the Staatskapelle percussion are all over the shop.

And so I arrive back at Tate, whose recording has the fewest significant black marks against it but also has a good deal of positives. We've dealt with von Otter and Bonney already; in addition, Tate has one of the finest witches in Marjana Lipovšek, who uses strong consonants to underline the character's evil intent without resorting to a haranguing vocal tone. There's a vivid mother in Hanna Schwarz and a dignified father in Andreas Schmidt. Ideally, Tate would have an extra handful of Eichhorn's fairy-dust and an ounce more orchestral tension. But he gives us the vital orchestral richness and detail, blossom and glow. He maintains momentum and colour as if he's turning the huge pages of an oversize picture book. Just as enchanting, surprising and, yes, profound as it should be. **G**

THE TOP CHOICE

Anne Sofie von Otter, Barbara Bonney; Bavarian RSO / Jeffrey Tate

EMI Ⓢ ② ➔ 754022-2

This is the most consistent recording:



an inviting, glowing orchestral performance that's detailed and never too grand; and a cast who can do character without resorting to caricature.

PLAYLISTS

Explore music via our themed listening suggestions – and why not create your own too?

Karen Cargill

The mezzo celebrates 'Scotland, My Scotland' and its many associations

Being Scottish born and bred, trained in Glasgow and continuing to live and work in my beloved Scotland, I am very proud that my country has played such an integral part of my musical development.

As a young girl, I was fascinated by the glamorous photograph of Maria Callas that graced an LP owned by my first singing teacher. Her 1954 recording of *Madama Butterfly* remains one of my favourites. Though I had no concept of classical music in my early years, folk music was something I heard lots of. My dad was a great fan of Jean Redpath and introduced me to her beautiful voice. The honesty, integrity and freedom in her singing is very moving.

Sir Alexander Gibson has been a huge influence in my career. My teacher, Patricia Hay, was a protégée of his and was present during the golden years of Scottish Opera, and Lady Gibson continues to be a big supporter of mine. His legacy is all around, through Scottish Opera, the RSNO, Edinburgh Festival Chorus, and not least his catalogue of recordings. And his affinity with Scandinavian music is well known. Anne Sofie von Otter is a singer I've always admired, and this song from Korngold's *Abschiedslieder* always takes my breath away.

The music of Gustav Mahler has had a profound effect on me. While expecting my son I performed *Das Lied von der Erde* for the first time with the BBC Scottish SO and Donald Runnicles. Five weeks after my son was born we performed it again at the BBC Proms. Christa Ludwig's glorious voice blossoms with humanity here.

The SCO, meanwhile, has been an incredible support to me – I'm honoured to work with such exceptional musicians.

The first score I was handed as an undergraduate was Verdi's Requiem; Pavarotti's 'Ingemisco' on Solti's recording is a thing of wonder. *St Matthew Passion* is also a piece that I have performed many times and never fail to be moved by.

As I made my move south to London, fate stepped in and introduced me to pianist Simon Lepper. He is a wonderful musician and his playing is incredibly moving.

But I've never forgotten my roots. I sang 'Mull of Kintyre' as a small child. Happy memories of where it all started.



In the month she turns 40, Scottish mezzo Karen Cargill recalls key works along her own musical journey

- **Puccini** *Madama Butterfly* – Un bel di
Maria Callas *sop*
EMI/Warner Classics
- **Burns** (trad) O Guid Ale Comes
Jean Redpath *sng*
Greentrax
- **Sibelius** *Symphony No 5 – Allegro molto*
RSNO / Sir Alexander Gibson
Chandos
- **Korngold** *Vier Lieder des Abschieds – Mond, so gehst du wieder auf*
Anne Sofie von Otter *mz* Bengt Forsberg *pf*
DG
- **Mahler** *Das Lied von der Erde – Der Abschied*
Christa Ludwig *mz* New Philh / Klemperer
Warner Classics
- **Brahms** *Serenade No 2 – Scherzo*
SCO / Sir Charles Mackerras
Telarc
- **Verdi** *Requiem – Ingemisco*
Luciano Pavarotti *ten* VPO / Sir Georg Solti
Decca
- **Bach** *St Matthew Passion – Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder*
English Baroque Soloists / Gardiner
Archiv Produktion
- **Zimmermann** *Violin and Piano Sonata – Rondo*
Carolyn Widmann *vn* Simon Lepper *pf*
ECM New Series
- **Traditional arr McCartney/Laine** *Mull of Kintyre*
Wings
Universal

Kirill Gerstein

A birthday tribute from one pianist to another...

November 30 is the 70th birthday of the great Romanian pianist, Radu Lupu. It is as good an occasion as any to celebrate his art. Lupu is far more than a great pianist; listening to him, my attention quickly slips away from the actual beauty of his piano-playing and I am taken deep below and far above the surface. He illuminates the musical content impalpably and there appears a feeling of magic. My professional habit of analysing 'how is this done?' yields only partial results when applied to his music-making, as the whole impression is greater than the sum of its ingredients.

Lupu's concerts remind me of what Ferruccio Busoni once wrote about the musical art: 'It is practically incorporeal. Its material is transparent. It is sonorous air. It is almost Nature itself.' The instrument recedes into the background, and what remains is a lone figure expressing the composer's ideas with fidelity, while seeming to compose them on the spot. In the opening of Schubert's final sonata, one phrase is enough to give a sense of the entire concert hall embraced by him. This experience is strongest in concert, and Lupu has chosen not to visit the recording studio in recent years. However, we are lucky to have his recordings to nourish

our ears while awaiting his future concerts. Here is a small selection of my personal favourites from his discography.

- **Mozart** Piano Concerto No 21, K467
ECO / Uri Segal
Decca
 - **Beethoven** 32 Piano Variations in C minor on an original theme, WoO80
Decca
 - **Beethoven** Piano Concerto No 3
Israel PO / Zubin Mehta
Decca
 - **Schubert** Impromptus, D899 - No 3 in G flat
Decca
 - **Schubert** Piano Sonata in B flat, D960
Decca
 - **Schubert** Moments musicaux, D780 - No 2 in A flat
Decca
 - **Schubert** Fantasia in F minor, D940
With Murray Perahia *pf*
Sony Classical
 - **Schumann** Kinderszenen
Decca
 - **Brahms** Intermezzi, Op 117 - No 3 in C sharp minor
Decca
 - **Brahms** Piano Sonata No 3 in F minor, Op 5
Decca
- Visit kirillgerstein.com

Martin Cullingford

Gramophone's Editor hails the continuing carol tradition with a modern playlist

The wider world's focus on choral music at Christmas ensures that much modern music nestles among evergreen Medieval

and Victorian favourites. Here's a listening list of contemporary carols – some familiar, some less so, and lots of contrast.

Top plaudits must go to the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, who, under Stephen Cleobury's stewardship, began in 1983 commissioning annually a new carol for the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols – a service that's broadcast live on Radio 4 every Christmas Eve. In these pages, Gabriel Jackson expressed his hope that 'other people will hear...and want to take it up', referring to his 2009 offering, *The Christ-child*. His hope was fulfilled when the Choir of St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh, recorded this gentle, uplifting piece for Delphian.

Arvo Pärt's *Bogoróditse Dévo* was commissioned by King's in 1990. Something of a surprise to those familiar with the Estonian composer's more usual meditative style, this joyous hymn to Mary – performed here by Schola Cantorum – bounces along in suitably celebratory style.

John Tavener's *Ex Maria Virgine*, commissioned by Timothy Brown of neighbouring Clare College in 2005, takes us on a journey from the Incarnation through celebration of Christ's coming and meditation on the miracle of birth.

Rautavaara's *Joulun virsi* ('Christmas Hymn') is a short but stirringly sung piece and well represents the quality of Ondine's disc of his complete works for male choir.

The serene expansiveness of American composer Morten Lauridsen's *O magnum mysterium* has found it a home on choral albums regardless of liturgical context, though the words actually come from the Matins of Christmas. The Choir of New College, Oxford, capture its beauty.

No contemporary choral line-up would be complete without a work from James MacMillan, one of our age's most significant writers of church music. His *Seinte Mari moder milde* was his contribution to the contemporary King's tradition in 1995, while Thomas Adès's *The Fayrfax Carol* and Judith Weir's *Illuminare, Jerusalem* were also both King's commissions (1997 and 1985 respectively); all three are performed here by the choir they were originally intended for.

Also on my playlist is Francis Pott's *Balulalow*, written in 2009 and dedicated to Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, which receives a heart-felt performance by Commotio.

A few years ago, Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols* might have just squeezed into a contemporary carols list, but let's instead give the final nod here to John Rutter's rousing companion suite, *Dancing Day*.



King's College Choir: continuing the carol tradition

- **Pärt** *Bogoróditse Dévo*
Schola Cantorum
2L
- **Jackson** *The Christ-child*
Choir of St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh / Duncan Ferguson
Delphian
- **Tavener** *Ex Maria Virgine*
Choir of Clare College, Cambridge / Timothy Brown
Naxos
- **Rautavaara** *Joulun virsi*
YL Male Voice Choir / Matti Hyökki
Ondine
- **Lauridsen** *O magnum mysterium*
Choir of New College, Oxford / Edward Higginbottom
Decca
- **Adès** *The Fayrfax Carol*
Choir of King's College, Cambridge / Stephen Cleobury
Warner Classics
- **MacMillan** *Seinte Mari moder milde*
Choir of King's College, Cambridge / Stephen Cleobury
Warner Classics
- **Weir** *Illuminare, Jerusalem*
Choir of King's College, Cambridge / Stephen Cleobury
Warner Classics
- **Pott** *Balulalow*
Commotio / Matthew Berry
Naxos
- **Rutter** *Dancing Day*
Cor Infantil Amics de la Unio / Josep Vila i Jover
La Mà de Guido



Kirill Gerstein: in awe of fellow pianist Radu Lupu



The playlists for this feature were compiled in conjunction with

Qobuz, the music streaming service. You can listen to the playlists at gramophone.co.uk/playlists

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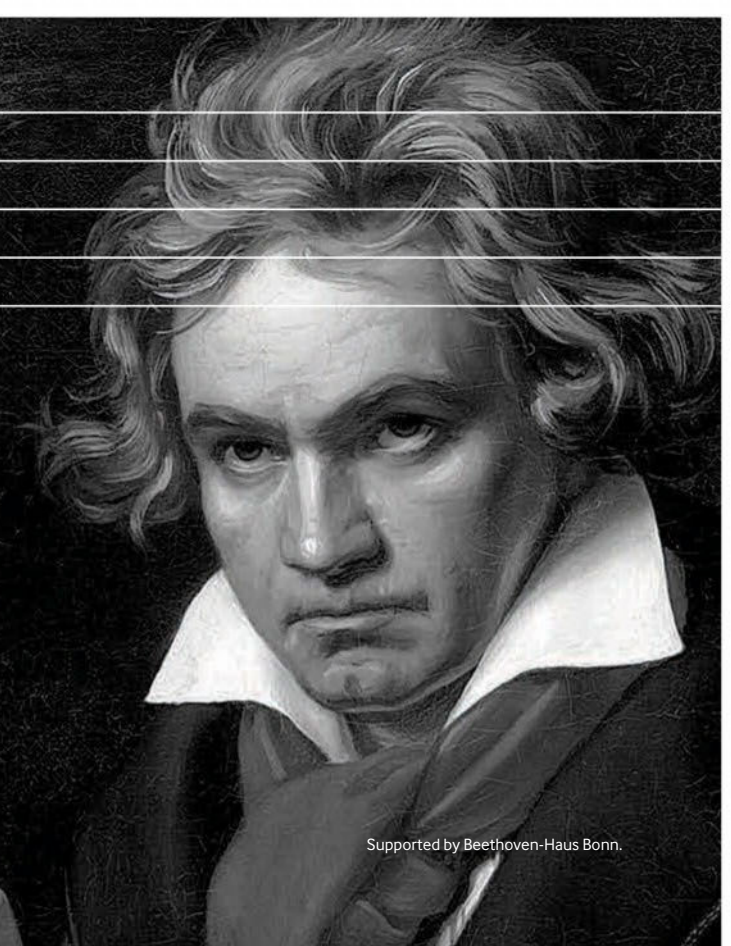
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PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

The lead-up to Christmas brings festive treats as well as some classy music-making from the world's greatest venues and ensembles – and you don't have to be there in person to enjoy it all

Victoria Hall, Geneva, & Espace 2 radio station **Jonathan Nott conducts the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, December 9**

Jonathan Nott, the OSR's Music and Artistic Director designate, officially takes up the baton next season, so this concert should give us a taste of the OSR's future programming. Two French classics book-end the concert: Ravel's orchestral arrangement of *Valses nobles et sentimentales* and Debussy's *La mer*. In between comes the world premiere of extracts from Richard Dubugnon's 2015 version of *Arcanes Symphoniques*, Op 30, and Dutilleul's cello concerto of 1970, *Tout un monde lointain*, with Truls Mørk as soloist.

osr.ch; rts.ch/espace-2/programmes/concert-du-mercredi-soir/

Christ Church, Spitalfields, & BBC Radio 3 **Harry Bickett conducts The English Concert, December 9 (radio broadcast December 10)**

The Spitalfields Music Winter Festival finds The English Concert directed by Harry Bickett in two contrasting settings of the Christmas story from 17th-century France and Italy. First up is Charpentier's cantata *In nativitate Domini nostri*, followed by *Ah! Troppo è ver* – a Christmas cantata by Charpentier's Tuscan contemporary Alessandro Stradella, whose scandalous life inspired no fewer than eight 19th-century operas. Also on the programme is another work by Charpentier, his *Magnificat*, H73, and Dandrieu's Trio Sonata No 2, Op 1.

spitalfieldsmusic.org.uk; bbc.co.uk/radio3

Cadogan Hall & BBC Radio 3

Alan Gilbert conducts the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, December 13 (broadcast January 5)

The New York Phil's Music Director Alan Gilbert makes his conducting debut with the ASMF in a programme featuring Brahms's *Haydn* Variations, Haydn's Symphony No 90 and Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 3. The evening's soloist is Inon Barnatan, making his third London appearance with the Academy.

asmf.org; bbc.co.uk/radio3

National Concert Hall, Dublin, & RTÉ lyric fm **RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, December 15**

Gavin Maloney conducts the RTÉ's Christmas Lunchtime Concert in a programme that opens with a piece that perhaps doesn't get quite as many outings as other festive works: Rimsky-Korsakov's Polonaise from *La nuit de Noël*. Then, Dublin mezzo Kate Allen is the

EVENT OF THE MONTH



Christmas at King's: Cleobury conducts

concert's star soloist, singing Bach and Handel. After some less obviously yuletide repertoire, ranging from Vivaldi to Vaughan Williams, there's a chance to join in for a carol or two.

rte.ie/nso; rte.ie/radio

Swiss Radio SRF 2

Lisa Batiashvili performs Sibelius's Violin Concerto, December 17

Lisa Batiashvili, the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich's current Artist-in-Residence, plays Sibelius's Violin Concerto, a work she has a long and close connection with having first performed it at 16 at the 1995 International Sibelius Competition. Lionel Bringuier conducts the programme, which also includes Ravel's *Shéhérazade* – *Ouverture de féerie* and Brahms's Symphony No 2. This is a pre-recorded broadcast of the concert which took place on October 31 and November 1 at the Grosser Saal in Zurich.

srf.ch/sendungen/im-konzertsaal/sendungen

Philharmonie, Berlin, & online

Sir Simon Rattle conducts Debussy's Pelléas et Mélisande, December 20

If you can't make it to either the Philharmonie this month, or London's Barbican next month, then this live streamed performance from Berlin is your opportunity to catch Peter Sellars's new, highly anticipated, semi-staged production of *Pelléas et Mélisande* for the BPO and LSO. This performance of Debussy's Impressionist masterpiece boasts

King's College, Cambridge, & BBC Radio 3 and 4, plus BBC World Service and various US radio stations; separate broadcast on BBC Two

Christmas at King's, December 24

For those prepared to queue, attending the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols is a unique experience. This year's new carol is Richard Causton's *Flight*, but the 3pm service also includes previously commissioned carols by Bob Chilcott and John Rutter, marking their 60th and 70th birthdays. Arrangements by the late Sir David Willcocks feature too, along with the *Nova! Nova!* setting by John Scott, who died in August. The event is broadcast live on Radio 4 and the next day on Radio 3. A separate service, Carols from King's, is pre-recorded for broadcast on BBC Two, also on Christmas Eve.

kings.cam.ac.uk; bbc.co.uk/radio3; bbc.co.uk/radio4; bbc.co.uk/worldserviceradio; bbc.co.uk/bbctwo

a magnificent cast, led by Magdalena Kožená as Mélisande and Christian Gerhaher as Pelléas.

berliner-philharmoniker.de; digitalconcerthall.com/en

Amsterdam Concertgebouw & online

A German Christmas with Windsbacher Boys' Choir, December 20

The Concertgebouw's Sunday Morning Concert strand has a particularly feel-good, Christmassy offering this year. Directed by Martin Lehmann, the concert features the Windsbacher Boys' Choir and brass ensemble Modern Slide Kwartet in a smorgasbord of works including German classics and traditional carols as well as more international repertoire by Britten and Whitacre. The concert will be streamed live, in high definition and free of charge, on the Live section of the Concertgebouw's website, where it will remain available for up to three days afterwards.

concertgebouw.nl/en

Musikverein, Vienna, & on television worldwide

The Vienna Philharmonic gives its New Year's Concert, January 1

Taking place in the Musikverein's Golden Hall and broadcast to more than 90 countries, the VPO's annual New Year's Day concert will feel especially celebratory as it marks the event's 75th anniversary. On the podium will be Mariss Jansons, leading his third New Year's Concert.

wienerphilharmoniker.at

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A value-for-money amplifier powerhouse, a simple but clever 'table radio' – and have we seen the future of loudspeakers?

Andrew Everard,
Audio Editor

DECEMBER TEST DISCS



This superb set on Resonus is both a lovely festive treat with its sparkling sound, and a fine tribute to the late John Scott



The latest Dunedin Consort recording on Linn Records combines perfect performance with demonstration-quality sound

Plenty of re-invention in audio

From speakers promising 'the future of sound' to a fresh look for Quad, this month is all about new ideas



Anyone familiar with the world of hi-fi will be au fait with the industry's penchant for hyperbole, but describing a new product as 'the future of sound' is giving it pretty big shoes to fill. Fortunately the new Bang & Olufsen BeoLab 90 **1** is certainly large enough to fill any footwear and, while the styling is the first thing to grab the attention, some of the vital statistics soon make it clear this is a highly ambitious design. It uses 18 drive units, each with its own amplifier, meaning that each speaker is driven with over 8kW of power, weighs in at 137kg and sells for just shy of £27,000 – and that's per speaker, not per pair!

More on the innovation behind the BeoLab 90, and the problems it sets out to tackle, in this month's Audio Essay (on page 128), in which I explain that this amazing design might just pave the way for a whole new generation of loudspeakers.

However, the Danish company isn't the only one doing a spot of re-invention: following on from its compact Vena amplifier, reviewed last month, the company has now launched its Artera series of hi-fi separates – marking, we're told, its 79th anniversary. And while Vena, for all its modern facilities, has styling harking back to earlier days of Quad, the new Artera models have a completely fresh design, albeit one developed in conjunction

with Rodney Mead, who was responsible for the styling of many classic Quad products from the 1970s to the 1990s.

The range is launched with the Artera Play, a combined CD player, DAC and preamplifier, selling for £1400, and the Artera Stereo, a £1500 power amplifier **2** offering 140W per channel into 8ohms, or 250Wpc into 4ohms, and using Quad's famous Current Dumping topology, first seen in the 405 amplifier.

The Play has a USB input for connection to a computer, and can handle music files at up to 32-bit/384kHz as well as DSD64/126/256, using the highly-regarded ESS Sabre32 digital to analogue converter. Conventional analogue and digital inputs are also provided.

The styling combines textured aluminium front panels with glass top-plates to create a structure designed for vibration-resistance, and the Artera Play's fascia has touch-sensitive control rather than conventional buttons.

Also reinvented this month is the Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin, the company's innovative dock speaker first launched eight years back. Now it's been completely reworked as the Zeppelin Wireless, selling for £499 **3**, and using not just completely new drive units, but more powerful digital signal processing and a redesigned, reinforced cabinet. The drivers

draw on the technology of both the CM series speakers and the recently-announced CM Series Diamond, and the speaker can connect to music using AirPlay, Bluetooth aptX and Spotify Connect, with control via a revamped Control App available for iOS, Android and both Windows and Mac OSX computers.

The latest arrival on the multiroom audio scene is one of the best-known names in radio: Roberts has launched its new R-Line **4**, which is due in the shops early in 2016. It's an unusual move for the long-established company, in that the new range isn't primarily about radio reception, but rather wireless multiroom: yes, some of the models still have DAB/FM tuners built-in, but they all offer wireless connectivity to allow the same music to be played around the house, or different content to be accessed in various 'zones'.

The range starts with the R1 and R100, which are designed to be used as stand-alone stereo speakers, or paired up to fill larger spaces: they have both Bluetooth and Wi-Fi streaming as well as Spotify Connect, and while the R1 sells for £180, the R100 adds that DAB/FM capability, and is £250.

Sitting at the top of the 'S' range, which starts with a compact wireless speaker, the £180 S1, is the SB1 soundbar, designed to also connect to a TV set for improved off-air sound. It will sell for £400. **5**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Rotel RC-1590/RB-1590

Old-school power and a very modern preamp in a value-for-money package

The Rotel brand has been at the core of mainstream audio for many years – in fact, next year will mark its 50th anniversary. Yet while it's long competed with other mid-range brands – the Denons, Marantz and Pioneers of this world – there's always been something slightly different about Rotel: it chooses to do things the hard way.

That means in-house manufacture of major components rather than the simpler route of buying 'off the shelf', careful selection by ear of other elements, and a close relationship with its distributors in the design and voicing of its products. What's more, it's long had a reputation for putting all the money inside its products rather than compromising quality in the quest for eye-catching industrial design: for a long time the choice was 'buy it in black or buy something else'.

True, things have changed a little of late – from the entry-level RA-10 stereo amplifier all the way through to the heavyweight AV receiver, you can now buy Rotels in silver! But the essential design philosophy is unchanged, while the company's design team, now based in China, works closely with distributor Bowers & Wilkins on the way its products sound. Well, it would: Rotel, along with Canadian hi-fi and home-cinema company Classé, is now part of the B&W Group, and the Chinese factory where the products are made is shared with the production of many of the more affordable B&W products.

Rotel has always covered many sectors of the market, and indicative of that are the latest amplifier arrivals, the £1395 RC-1590 preamplifier and matching RB-1590 power amplifier, selling for £2395. Yes, those

ROTEL RC-1590

Type Preamplifier/DAC

Price £1395

Analogue inputs Moving magnet phono, four line inputs, plus one on balanced XLR
Digital inputs USB-A, USB-B, three coaxial and three optical, aptX Bluetooth

Analogue outputs One set of line outs, preamp-level outs on two sets of RCA phonos, and two sets of balanced XLRs, headphones

Other connections 12V trigger and remote connections, Ethernet port for updates

Accessories supplied Remote handset, Bluetooth antenna

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43.1x14.4x34.8cm

ROTEL RB-1590

Type Dual-mono power amplifier

Price £2395

Power output 350Wpc into 8ohms

Inputs RCA phono/XLR balanced



Outputs Two sets of combination speaker terminals per channel

Other connections 12V trigger/remote

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43.1x23.7x45.4cm

rotel.com

prices may seem quite a leap from the 12 Series, but the Rotel designers are aiming high with these 1590 models, which are priced very competitively against the kind of hardware they have in their sights.

Take delivery of the two, and the first thing to be noted is that the power amplifier is both very large and very heavy: while sitting within a fairly conventional hi-fi footprint, it is getting on for 24cm tall, and weighs a not inconsiderable 38.1kg, meaning it's best used on the floor or a very low stand – not many standard hi-fi racks will be able to accommodate its weight or bulk.

The payoff for that stature is a very useful dollop of power, the RB-1590 delivering

350W per channel into an 8ohm load, a figure that's not all about ear-shattering volume levels, but the power in reserve to handle the real-world dynamics of music when driving even demanding loudspeakers. Incidentally, it was interesting to see RB-1590s being used when it came to demonstrating the new B&W 800 Series Diamond speakers (covered last month) at the company HQ in Worthing.

Whereas Rotel has turned of late to Class D amplification for its 15-Series power amplifiers, the RB-1590 sees a return to 'old school' Class AB operation, chosen mainly for its superior performance: look under the lid of the

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The Rotel combination offers superb value for money. Here's a suggested system to build around it

APPLE MACBOOK PRO

A direct connection via USB will allow music to be played from computer storage: the likes of the Apple MacBook Pro will make this simple



THE B&W CM8 S2

With all that power on hand, the Rotel can drive almost any speakers: given the common 'parentage', the B&W CM8 S2 would make a particularly good combination



power amplifier and you'll see two large toroidal transformers, with the proud label 'Custom designed and manufactured by Rotel', straddled by the two mono amplifier sections down either side of the casework.

The RB-1590 is a fairly basic, if very powerful, amplifier, having little more than a choice of RCA phono or balanced XLR inputs, plus two sets of speaker terminals, for each channel; the same can't be said for the RC-1590, combining as it does the functions of preamplifier and digital-to-analogue converter, able to be connected to a computer via a USB-B socket to play music at up to 192kHz/24-bit, as well as DSD. It also has a front-panel input for playback from, and charging, portable devices (as well as playing from USB memory), and built-in aptX Bluetooth via an antenna on the rear panel.

However, Rotel says the ethos of simplicity has been applied here, to the extent that the analogue preamplifier and digital sections have their own power

The power and resolution really makes connecting up the computer to play this kind of high-resolution material very worthwhile

supplies, and were designed by separate teams within the company: in addition to its fully isolated digital inputs, which feed 32-bit/768kHz conversion with upsampling, the RC-1590 also has a moving magnet phono stage for use with a turntable and four more analogue line inputs, one on balanced XLR sockets. Two sets of outputs, on both XLRs and phonos, are provided to allow the Rotel to be used with multiple power amplifiers, and a fixed volume level can be set on any of the line inputs, to allow the preamp to be used in conjunction with a surround processor or receiver.

PERFORMANCE

This is a mightily impressive amplifier for the money: it has the kind of effortless detail and dynamics that comes with serious power, and a clarity and immediacy to the way it plays music that's hard not to like.

Play a large-scale orchestral work and the Rotels both dig deep and power

out the music without any sense of ever needing to work hard, the impact of large musical forces hugely satisfying whether you are playing the system at modest levels or pushing the volume higher. Pair this combination with a decent pair of floorstanding speakers and the sound has definite spine-tingling potential, not just in the sheer attack the amplifier can muster, but also due to the firm control it exercises over the speakers, making rhythms tight and precise while at the same time allowing the music to flow in a rich, weighty manner.

Yes, there are amplifiers able to deliver even greater levels of detail and ambience, and in absolute terms the Rotel is a little soft at times, but it's not just a one-trick amplifier, good only for slamming out dramatic symphonic works: play the Artemis Quartet's recent Erato set of Brahms, as a 24-bit/96kHz Qobuz download, and the crisp focus of the intertwining instrumental lines is as delicious as the soaring voices and organ of Parry's *I Was Glad* from the choir of St John's College, Cambridge, also as a Qobuz hi-res download.

On the choral recording, there's just the right balance between prominent voices and surrounding ambience, while the organ is delivered with a very real sense of a large instrument being played in an even larger space: it's an entirely thrilling sound, delivered with real verve and presence.

What's more, the power and resolution on offer here really makes connecting up the computer to play this kind of high-resolution material very worthwhile, with the Rotels shining when playing DSD files such as Riko Fukuda's fortepiano recordings of Mendelssohn, (on Aliud, via nativeDSD.com). This is a very 'live' sounding set, with bags of ambience around the big-boned sound of the instruments, which are recorded without over-close miking, and the Rotels deliver an excellent impression of a real performance in a credible space.

Direct, clean and entirely effortless, and with the ability to drive and control almost any speakers you throw at it – so to speak! – this new Rotel combination does a fine job of combining classic amplifier design with the demands of the modern computer audio world. It comes firmly recommended. **G**

Or you could try...



Cambridge Audio Azur

Despite its value-for-money pricing, the Rotel pre/power amplifier isn't exactly alone in its sector of the market: for example, you could combine the Cambridge Audio Azur 851W power amplifier (£1500), with either the £800 Azur 851D DAC/preamplifier or the company's £1200 Azur 851N network player/DAC, which also has outputs able to be used straight into a power amplifier. For more information, visit cambridgeaudio.com



Arcam A49

For a one-box solution, but still with a good dose of power, the Arcam A49 (£3995) is an excellent integrated amplifier choice, or you could opt for the pre/power version, the £2745 C49 and £3245 P49 – though with both of these you'll need to add a separate DAC for digital playback. Read more by visiting arcam.co.uk



Naim's Supernait 2

Naim's Supernait 2, at £2965, is another excellent one-box amplifier choice, but for streaming capability you could either choose the company's £3675 SuperUniti, or combine the excellent NAC-N 272 network preamplifier (£3300) with the NAP 250DR power amplifier (£3395). Explore these options by visiting naimaudio.com

● REVIEW RUARK R2 MKIII

A table radio to turn heads

Updated all-in-one makes a persuasive second-room network system

The appeal of Ruark's audio systems isn't hard to understand: here we have a line-up of systems, from a mono radio all the way through to freestanding 'music centre' (complete with spindly legs), combining style with high-quality materials and build, and using the latest audio technology.

They're the kind of systems able to work well in a wide range of interiors, both in sonic terms and aesthetically, and consistently offer more than would initially appear when it comes to facilities and flexibility. And they have solid audio engineering behind them, too: the current company grew out of what was one of the UK's best-known loudspeaker

It won't look tiny as a main system but it's still compact enough to be used as a rather superior bedside radio

manufacturers, and in the classic manner of a speaker designer looking for a new product for his own use. Having founded Ruark Acoustics with his father back in 1985, Alan O'Rourke launched the company's first 'table radio' in 2005, combining what the company describes as 'style, ease of use, craftsman build-quality and above all the sound quality he found missing in so many products of the time'.

The R2 followed that original model in 2007, logically taking the mono audio of the R1 and adding to it stereo sound. Now, 10 years after its first table radio appeared, and with the R1 now in MkIII form, comes the third-generation R2, selling for £399.

One of the disadvantages of having a style as distinctive as Ruark's – all about steel panels and curvaceous handcrafted cabinets finished in real wood or high-quality paint – is that successive generations of products tend to look very similar. That's the case with the R2 MkIII, but under that sleek casework just about everything here is new: it may still look like a relatively simple 'table radio', with the fascia kept clean and simple and all the controls on the company's top-mounted multifunction controller, but in fact it offers rather more than just DAB, DAB+ and FM radio.

There's also internet radio, Bluetooth connectivity for smartphones,

tablets and computers, a USB input for music on memory devices, Spotify Connect music streaming and the ability to play music stored on computers or network storage over a home Wi-Fi network.

That's a pretty impressive specification for a compact 'clock radio' – it also has dual alarms with once, weekly, weekday and weekend settings – and doubly so when all that, plus 18W of amplification and twin 8.9cm custom-made drive units, is packed into a unit just 36cm wide.

As a result, it won't look tiny when used as a main system in a modestly-sized room, which its audio section is more than capable of filling, but it's still just about compact enough to be used as a rather superior bedside radio.

As well as the onboard sources, the R2 MkIII has the ability to charge connected smartphones via its USB socket, and line audio inputs both front and rear – the rear one on a 3.5mm stereo socket, the rear on a pair of RCA phonos – plus a headphone socket. It's available in a choice of rich walnut wood veneer, soft white or soft black, with the underlying cabinetwork made from the same kind of MDF commonly used for hi-fi speaker enclosures.

PERFORMANCE

Set-up takes a moment, and the Ruark proves generally easy to use, although it's best operated with a smartphone or tablet to hand, as you'll ideally need one of these to access features including Spotify Connect and the network streaming. Yes, you can access music directly via the Ruark, but if you have a big library that's going to involve quite a lot of scrolling via remote and display: better by far to have a controller to push content from your network storage to it. The likes of Linn's Kinsky software or PlugPlayer will do the job very nicely: you just line up a list of music to play using your portable device, and send it to the Ruark.

However you access the music, one thing is consistent: the little R2 MkIII plays it in an entirely convincing, room-filling fashion. In fact, on more than one occasion I had to check whether I was listening to the Ruark or a much bigger system, so well does this 'table radio' deliver not just the essence of the music, but also the weight, scale and ambience.

Yes, the overall balance here is on the warm and rich side of neutral, making some



SPECIFICATION

RUARK R2 MKIII

Type Table radio

Price £399

Inputs/sources DAB/DAB+/FM radio, Internet radio, Spotify Connect, UPnP DLNA streaming, Bluetooth, two line audio inputs (on 3.5mm stereo and RCA phonos), USB audio

Headphone out Yes

File compatibility MP3, WMA, AAC, FLAC, WAV up to 96kHz/24-bit

Accessories supplied Power supply, antenna, remote handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 36x11.9x19cm
ruarkaudio.com

BBC Radio 4 speech in particular decidedly sonorous, but when playing music it manages to deliver plenty of sparkle and involvement in the midband and treble: what's more it will handle content all the way up to 24-bit/96kHz, making it easy to use as an add-on or second-zone system with a high-resolution main set-up.

Even a demanding recording such as The Sixteen's reading of Allegri's *Miserere* finds the Ruark more than capable of presenting the music not only in an enjoyable fashion, but with a real sense of depth and perspective to the sound, which I certainly wasn't expecting from an all-in-one unit using such small drivers.

Even off-axis there's a good impression of stereo and space in the sound, so you don't have to sit close-up to the system or with your head fixed in front of it: almost anywhere in the room you'll get a fine sense of the recording, which is a clear sign of just how well Ruark's designers understand the technology of systems such as this, and have developed them to give an almost uncanny level of performance.

Whether playing solo instrumental recordings or orchestral pieces, the R2 MkIII never lost its ability to surprise and entertain, and these qualities were repeated across the range of inputs and sources on offer. This really is quite a magical little system. **G**

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● ESSAY

Taking the room out of the speaker equation

Lots of drivers, amplifiers and digital signal processing – can Bang & Olufsen change the way we all listen?

Well, that was a close one! Bang & Olufsen's new flagship loudspeaker had a number of targets in mind: the company wanted to re-establish itself as a serious speaker choice for the high-end audio enthusiast, as well as tackling one of the major problems with all loudspeakers – the room in which they're used. Oh, and though it may have seemed a long way off when the project first started, more than four years ago, it had one absolute, fixed target it had to hit: the speaker had to be ready in time for the Danish company's 90th anniversary celebrations last month.

It made it, and with a little time to spare, although at the launch event in October it was clear there were just a few cosmetic finishing touches to be signed off – notably the complex shapes of the wood panels at the base of the massive speaker's main enclosure, the only part of the main structure that's actually visible below the striking fabric skin covering the whole enterprise. With all the rest of the engineering and design going on in the BeoLab 90, it looked to me like one of the simpler parts of the speaker, but apparently it was still giving the designers and engineers headaches right up to the moment of the 'reveal'.

But while the unusual shape created by the cloth cover of the speaker (the work of Cologne-based design consultancy Frackenpohl Poulheim) was getting the design journalists present at the launch very excited, what got me thinking was the clever stuff going on 'under the skin'. Bang & Olufsen had been teasing the new speakers with the Twitter hashtag #FutureOfSound, and when it became clear just what the BeoLab 90 was designed to do, I have to admit I started to understand what the company was getting at.

This isn't the first attempt to alter the way speakers interact with the room in which they're used: much as we'd all like to listen in an ideal environment, domestic compromises mean that when we listen,



Radical looks combine with technological innovation to create something genuinely thought-provoking

The multiple drivers, amplifiers and all that signal processing allows the sound to be 'steered'

we're hearing not just what the speakers are doing, but how the room is affecting the sound of the speakers. As a result, many attempts have been made to compensate for that, from the kind of auto-calibration found in many home-cinema surround systems to more mathematical approaches such as Linn's SPACE Optimisation, found in its Exakt models.

However, while such approaches are all about taking conventional speakers and compensating for the way a room is making them sound, the BeoLab 90 design is anything but conventional: under that outer shape, officially described as a 'rhombus shape of black fabric covers, which like sails hover', sit seven 3cm high-frequency tweeters, each driven by its own 300W digital amplifier; seven 8.6cm midrange drivers, again with a 300W amp apiece, and four woofers – three 21.2cm

units and a 26cm front-firing one – each of which is powered by a 1000W amplifier.

The treble and mid-range drivers are in a 'head' assembly, while the bass units are in a polygonal aluminium enclosure, itself weighing some 65kg and also housing all that amplification and the brains of the outfit – some serious digital signal processing and 18 channels of digital-to-analogue conversion. That DSP, plus the fact the BeoLab90 has groups of drivers firing in multiple directions (four for the bass, five for the midband and treble), is what enables the speaker to do its acoustic tricks.

Let's come back to that myth of the ideal – ie acoustically 'invisible' – listening room, and add to it the concept of the 'sweet spot': that single position in which the speakers sound best. Even at this ideal position it's hard to make

every frequency sound the same, due to the different dispersion characteristics (in other words, the spread of sound) of the various drivers used – and even if you can get a 'sweet spot', it's of course only good for one listener.

What the BeoLab 90 is designed to do is allow the dispersion characteristics of the whole speaker to be optimised for that ideal position, or for a wider position, or indeed for the best compromise between several listening positions. The multiple drivers, amplifiers and all that signal processing allows the sound from the speaker to be 'steered', while at the same time allowing the speaker to compensate for the character of the room itself.

That should mean an optimal sound, wherever you choose to listen, and all controlled via settings and presets on a smartphone or tablet app. What's more, the company says this technology can be trickled down to smaller – and more affordable – speakers, and has every intention of doing just that in the next 12 months.

There may be something in this 'future of sound' business, you know... **G**



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NOTES & LETTERS

Mozart's *Sinfonia concertante*, K364 • Pierre Monteux recalled • Sir Colin Davis's Haydn

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Primrose's mastery of K364...

I was happy to see that William Primrose, arguably the greatest viola player of all time, is duly honoured in Richard Wigmore's *Gramophone* Collection article about Mozart's *Sinfonia concertante*, K364 (October, page 104). As RW points out, it is indeed intriguing that Primrose took part in the two most extreme readings of the piece's divine *Andante*: those led by Pablo Casals with Isaac Stern (at just over 14 minutes the slowest on record), and Izler Solomon with Jascha Heifetz (the fastest, at 8'42"), and managed to make musical sense in both cases. However, the recording that shows Primrose in the best light isn't even mentioned: in 1941 he teamed up with that most elegant American violinist, Albert Spalding, like Primrose himself a former student of Eugène Ysaÿe. With two players from the same stylistic background (the Franco-Belgian school), conducted by the Viennese expatriate, Fritz Stiedry, the performance is uniquely unanimous and positively sizzles. And, for the record, the timing of the *Andante* (11 minutes) lies exactly between those by Casals and Heifetz! A pity they did not play Ysaÿe's cadenzas, probably because they require Mozart's *scordatura* tuning for the viola, which Primrose chose to dispense with. By the way, the *scordatura* was employed – apart from Nobuko Imai, as described in the article, and of course the 'period' players – by Peter Schidlöf and Lionel Tertis.

Carlos María Solare
President, International Viola Society
Berlin, Germany

...and not forgetting Suk, et al

Richard Wigmore's excellent survey of Mozart's masterpiece, the *Sinfonia concertante*, concludes, as always, with a Selected Discography.

There are two wonderful performances of this work not included in the selection. These are those by Yehudi Menuhin and Rudolf Barshai, with the Bath Festival Orchestra (EMI, 12/63) and Josef Suk and Milan Skampa (Supraphon, 8/66) under Kurt Redel. I would urge anyone who is unfamiliar with these readings to seek them out. Suk, incidentally, also recorded the work with Iona Brown (Argo, 7/84), whose performance with Lars Anders

Letter of the Month



Pierre Monteux, Principal Conductor of the LSO during one of its greatest periods (1961-64)

Pierre Monteux remembered

The review of the Pierre Monteux Beethoven set (November, page 28) reminded me of one of my earliest concert experiences. While students in Birmingham in the early 1960s, a friend and I attended a concert in the newly consecrated Coventry Cathedral given by the LSO and Monteux, preceded by items from the Heinrich Schütz Choir. The orchestra then played the *Enigma*

Variations. There was a slight delay at the end of the interval. Where was the conductor? Eventually slow, shuffling footsteps were heard as the venerable maestro made his way down the centre aisle, having made his tour of inspection of the building. We were then thrilled by his account of Beethoven's Fifth. A truly memorable evening!
John Moreton, by email

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Please send letters responding to articles in this issue for consideration for publication in the January issue by December 10. *Gramophone* reserves the right to edit all letters for publication.

PRESTO
CLASSICAL

Tomter and the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra receives Richard Wigmore's top recommendation.

Keith Pearce
Penzance

Sir Colin Davis's Haydn

David Thresher and Geraint Lewis were largely in agreement in *Classics Reconsidered* (October, page 100) regarding the merits of Haydn's 'London' Symphonies with Sir Colin Davis and the Concertgebouw Orchestra. When these recordings were first issued on LP the

symphonies were sometimes coupled with earlier Haydn symphonies; No 99 with No 88, No 103 with No 87, and No 98 with No 86.

Thanks to Pentatone, No 88 appeared on CD about a decade ago. However, I believe Symphonies Nos 86 and 87 have yet to make it to CD.

So while the 'London' Symphony recordings have, apparently, classic status, equally compelling performances of other Haydn symphonies remain in the vaults.

Alan Masters
Auckland, New Zealand

French operatic rarities

I was interested to read Richard Lawrence's piece on reviving rare French opera (October, page 20). We have just returned from the Wexford Festival Opera where we saw Hérold's *Le pré aux clercs* in a co-production with Opéra-Comique/Wexford and Palazzetto Bru Zane. In addition, I note that next year Wexford will be staging David's *Herculanum*, which was also mentioned in the article.

John Shackleton

Co Kildare, Ireland

Editorial notes

Jeremy Dibble's review of Bliss's *Morning Heroes* (November, page 74) omitted reference to a recording of the work made

in 1991/92 and issued by Cala records (2/93); Michael Kibblewhite conducts the LPO and Brian Blessed is the orator.

Regarding the Bruckner/Walter article in Replay (November, page 95), the Bruckner Ninth under Bruno Walter was not a first release of this performance. Pristine Classical says: 'Further investigation reveals it not to be the 1950 performance originally suspected, but in fact one which took place in 1953. Although this performance has appeared on releases elsewhere, this release has been prepared from a far better source than would appear to have been the case in the past, allowing the full glory of the New York Philharmonic to be heard in this performance for the first time.'

OBITUARY

A key figure in Stravinsky's creative life has died at the age of 92

ROBERT CRAFT

Conductor, author, and amanuensis to Stravinsky
Born October 20, 1923
Died November 10, 2015

Robert Craft, whose name is inextricably linked to that of Igor Stravinsky, has died aged 92. Born in New York where he studied at Juilliard, Craft was a gifted musician and, despite having his education interrupted by army service, was soon studying conducting at Tanglewood with Pierre Monteux. His particular interests were early music (Gesualdo and Monteverdi being particular favourites) and 12-tone music (he would later not only introduce Stravinsky to the music of Schoenberg but would record most of Schoenberg's major works).

Craft first encountered Stravinsky in 1947 when he wrote to the composer asking to borrow a score for a forthcoming performance of the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* – Stravinsky replied that he'd like to conduct the work himself. Soon Craft was drawn into the Stravinskys' life, and household, where he'd remain until the composer's death in 1971. He would be involved in all of Stravinsky's works from the early 1950s onwards, helping with conducting, recording, and every detail from orchestration and transcription into manuscript for publication.

For many people, it was the series of books that Craft wrote, drawing on conversations with Stravinsky, that brought his name into contact with a large audience. After Stravinsky's death, Craft continued to write, reflecting not only on



Craft with Stravinsky and the score of *The Flood*, 1962

his long relationship with the composer but also recalling the many people he'd encountered down the years, including TS Eliot, WH Auden and George Balanchine. He was an engaging and lively writer.

Craft's greatest influence on Stravinsky's music derived from his deep knowledge and sympathy for the music of the Second Viennese School, an interest he passed to Stravinsky which would result in works like *Agon*, *Abraham and Isaac* and perhaps the masterpiece of the late works, the *Requiem Canticles*.

His recorded legacy includes early music as well as Schoenberg and Stravinsky for CBS (now Sony Classical), and editions of the music of Stravinsky, Schoenberg and Webern for Naxos.

NEXT MONTH JANUARY 2016



Janine Jansen on Brahms and Bartók

The Dutch violinist reveals the deep connection between Brahms's Concerto and Bartók's First, the two works featuring on her new Decca recording

Elgar's Violin Sonata

Jeremy Dibble surveys the available recordings of this extraordinary chamber work, composed in West Sussex at the end of the First World War

Dutilleux at 100

As we approach the centenary of the French composer's birth in January, Gavin Dixon talks to Pascal Rophé about the conductor's forthcoming recording for BIS of four Dutilleux world premieres

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John Bercow

The Speaker of the House of Commons on music to drive to, and performing in G&S

My first memories of classical music come from my parents' house when I was growing up in north London. Mum and dad liked to have it playing in the living room in the evenings and at weekends, particularly when people visited. Music was a constant companion in my childhood, especially Mozart, who was my mother's favourite.

Somewhat pathetically, the only instrument I have ever learned to play was the school-mandated recorder. I was a member of the school choir, though; however, I was expelled in 1973, aged 10, on the grounds of my inadequate voice.

As Speaker, I have sought to open up Speaker's House to charities and other worthwhile organisations, and it was therefore a pleasure to host two receptions for The Passage in the State Rooms, at which the baritone Christopher Maltman and violinist Charlie Siem gave wonderful performances. I had the pleasure of visiting the charity last year and seeing first-hand the wonderful work they do in transforming lives and helping thousands end their homelessness for good.

My constituency of Buckingham is both largely rural and very large. As a result I spend a good deal of time driving between constituency advice surgeries, meetings and school visits, which gives me an ideal opportunity to indulge in my favourite music. Most frequently on my playlist are Beethoven, Mozart, Elgar, Dvořák and Bach, with an honourable mention to Prokofiev's 'Juliet's Funeral', which I think is a simply superb piece of music. The day I've had largely dictates which CD I excavate from the glovebox. If I've had a busy time of it and I'm feeling a bit hyperactive as a result, I find Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony wonderfully soothing. On the other hand, if I'm gearing up for a meeting at the other end of the constituency and I'm already tired after a long day, Elgar's 'Nimrod' has the desired effect.

The Parliament Choir is excellent and contains a number of talented singers. Although I have often wanted to invite them to give a performance in the Dining Room in Speaker's House, they are rather a big group, and I fear that even if we managed to fit them all in, there would be no room for any kind of audience. The Commons band MP4, however, *have* played Speaker's House to rapturous acclaim from colleagues; they've also travelled, at my request, to Buckingham to raise money for Help for Heroes. I was, and am, enormously grateful to them.

I am a huge champion of charities that help children with speech and language difficulties. My eldest son, Oliver, was diagnosed with autism at a very young age and I consider the work that these groups do to be of inestimable value both to children like him and in terms of the support they offer parents. I have the honour of being President of Afasic, and a parent patron of Ambitious about Autism, along with my wife



THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

Beethoven Symphony No 6, 'Pastoral'
Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Karajan
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If I've had a busy time of it, I find Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony wonderfully soothing

Sally. I attend conferences held by such organisations as often as my diary allows, either to speak or, in a small way, to lend moral support by being a member of the audience. It was at one such gathering a few years ago that I realised the transformative effect that music can have. We were introduced to a young boy with autism who was about 14 or 15 years of age. He was non-verbal – that is to say, he didn't speak. Yet he could sing, and he sang magnificently. It was a truly life-enhancing experience to hear a young man who couldn't communicate through speech but found an outlet of expression through the medium of music.

My yearly billing as the narrator in the Buckingham Choral Society's annual Gilbert and Sullivan production is a source of great enjoyment for me and amusement to my constituents. Wisely, although the Society has always been too polite to state the obvious reasoning behind the decision, I am kept away from any kind of singing, but I try to do justice to my non-musical role. This year it was *The Yeoman of the Guard* which was a hilarious experience, but I confess a fondness for the marvellously farcical *HMS Pinafore*. I love taking part and will continue to do so for as long as the audience tolerate me, and the Society keeps inviting me back. **G**

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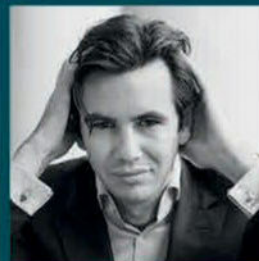
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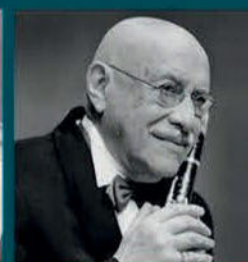
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